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Indian Horizons

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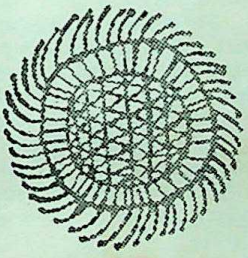

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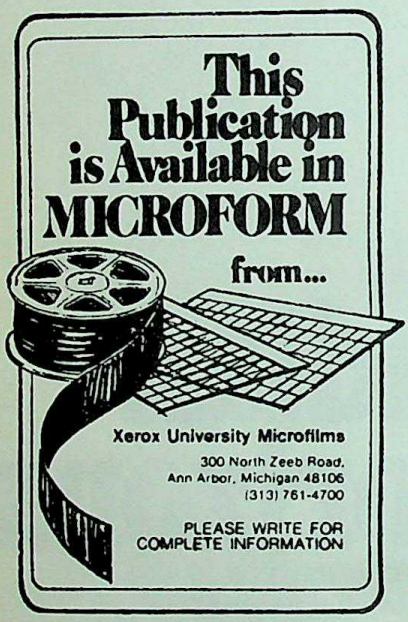

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indian horizons

Krishna Chaitanya — 1
The Mahabharata and the Creative use of Imagery

V.S.Naravane — 11
The Buddhist Element in Modern Indian Thought and Culture

M.C. Joshi — 40
Tantrism and Womanhood

Gopinatha Mohanty (fiction) — 55
The Shelter

Prabanchan (fiction) — 62
Brahma – Vriksha

Chandradhar Sharma Guleri (fiction) — 69
He had said

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra — 80
Prakrit Love Poetry

Book Reviews — 84

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The Mahabharata and the Creative use of Imagery

Krishna Chaitanya

I

In the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa makes an exceptionally brilliant use of imagery as the prime instrument of creative expression and communication and this paper is an attempt to analyse it. In one sense, it is a sequel to the study of the *Ramayana* published in an earlier issue of this journal. That paper rather specifically highlighted the anticipations by Valmiki of Eisenstein's concept and use of the image. The present analysis can also conveniently start with such a *rapprochement*.

The creative process, says Eisenstein, proceeds in the following manner. "Before the inner vision, before the perception of the creator, hovers a given image, emotionally embodying his theme. The task that confronts him is to transform this image into a few basic . . . . . partial representations which, in their combination and juxtaposition, shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator, reader or auditor, that same initial general image which originally hovered before the creative artist. This applies both to the image of the work of art as a whole and the image of each separate scene or part." If Eisenstein is more familiarly remembered for his principle of montage, it actually relates to the need for transforming the basic image into partial images, this being essential for sustaining extended episodic narration. In the face of "the need for connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action," montage becomes the principle for ordering the succession and juxtaposition of the particular images "Each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given particular representation of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates all the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that general quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into that generalized image, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme."

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While studying the anticipations of the Eisensteinian concept in Valmiki, we noticed a significant difference. It is with the feeling-saturated image, the image that has become an objective correlative, that Eisenstein starts. In all probability, this was due to the fact that he was writing in what could be called an applied art context which did not call for the analysis of the relation between art and life. But, whatever the reason, this deeper reach of theory is not found in his text while, for Valmiki, a sacramental living which will release the profoundest meaning possible from existence on earth is the fundamental imperative of man; the feelings that incarnate as images and can be elaborated as art have to be in harmony with this life-goal. This outlook is exemplified even more strongly in Vyasa and deserves some detailed elucidation.

Lewis Feuer, though himself a philosopher, has voiced serious misgivings about the philosophy of schoolmen. He feels that academic philosophy has become "essentially a training in disputation in the mediaeval tradition" and proceeds to make a significant point. "Though academic philosophy withers in the colleges and universities, philosophy itself cannot be suppressed. While our professional philosophers practise their respective non-philosophies, the function of philosophey itself has been assumed by religious thinkers, historians, scientists, novelists." What Feuer notes about today is true of the past too. Liberating the religious and philosophic spirit from creed and institution, Tillich defined it as ultimate concern and this is the prime characteristic of the *Mahabharata*. But in its probing, it used a third approach. The problems and imperatives of existence had already engaged in the metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads and the ethical thinking of the Dharma Sastra. The creative insight of art had to contemplate the plenitude of life, with its myriad types of men and mesh of events, and see whether the aesthetic world-view harmonized with the vision gained through the other two perspectives.

Therefore Vyasa chose poetry as his medium and the core of poetry is imagery.

II

"Judging whether life is or is not worth living," wrote Camus, "amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." Since life evolved in the world, and since the mind which contemplates life and the world seems to be the further evolute of life, this fundamental question can be amplified, as Ortega y Gasset has done. "Where does the world come from, and whither is it going? Which the supreme power of the cosmos, what the essential meaning of life?" Ortega stresses the need for a comprehensive vision. "We cannot breathe confined to a realm of

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secondary and intermediate themes. We need a comprehensive perspective, foreground and background, not a maimed scenery, a horizon stripped of infinite distances. Without the aid of the cardinal points we are liable to lose our bearings."

But where philosophy - whether it hugged matter and science or spirit and transcendentalism - seems to have ended up seems to be in the complete loss of bearings. Henry Sturt has shown how philosophical views, which otherwise seem the opposite of each other, alike threaten the person, the agent of action chosen in free resolve, who is trying to decide how life is best lived. "One adversary tells each of us: 'You are a transitory resultant of physical processes'; and the other: 'You are an unreal appearance of the Absolute.' Naturalism and Absolutism, antagonistic as they seem to be, combine in assuring us that personality is an illusion." What Sturt calls Naturalism is scientism; and the world-view of today's scientism is essentially the same as that of the Ajivikas and Lokayatikas of Vyasa's epoch. And what Sturt calls Absolutism is the view that accepts only transcendental Being as real and rejects Becoming, world, historical existence as unreal. The Eleatic philosphers of Greece, before Vyasa, and Sankara, after him, opted for this negation.

Convinced that certitude could be gained by integrating empirical knowledge and intuitive insight, Vyasa rejected both these positions and fought on two fronts to structure a valid philosophy for man. This involved an almost total reconstruction which has been studied in detail in this writer's *The Mahabharata: A Literary Study* (Clarion Books, 1985) and cannot be repeated here. But a very brief summary has to be attempted. In Vyasa's physics, the brick of the universe is not the dead Galilean particle but the ensouled particle of Leucippus, Democritus and Lucretius; Schroedinger too has repeatedly warned that the particle of today's quantum physics, endowed with self-movement, is not at all the same thing as the inert material particle of Galilean physics. Vyasa's biology, adapted from Samkhya, rejects the Darwinian kind of reading of evolution as fortuitous and affirms a superordinate, overarching teleology in nature, like the biology of Bergson, Lecomte du Nouy, Berg and Adolph Portmann. At the level of psychology, Freud decomposes the human personality into a blindly instinctual id, a blindly moralistic superego which uncritically interiorizes the proscriptions and commendations of the social ambience, and an ego which is blindly materialistic since the growth from the Pleasure Principle to the Reality Principle which Freud speaks of is no genuine growth as the ego still remains driven by the hedonistic stimulus though it may adopt a more cautiously realistic stratagem. Vyasa is aware of all the dangers of the libertinism of the unconscious and the mindless automatisms generated by conditioning, but he affirms that the ego can win over them and become the friend of the self so that

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the self can grow into a soul.

Since Vyasa is convinced that the goal of evolution has been this freedom (and responsibility) to enrich one's being, existence for him is not a fall of Sophia as the Gnostics held, not an alienation from transcendental reality but its appearing forth in the incarnate, empirical world. Vyasa's outlook here anticipates with surprising precision that of Berdyaev. The latter affirmed history and pointed out that authentic history would not be possible if natural law remained mechanistically deterministic; but he also added that the result would be the same if the divine principle was so absolutely exclusive that it allowed no ontological autonomy to man, for in that case history would begin with the Kingdom of God and there would therefore be no genuine history. For Berdyaev, the historical process has "its origin in the depths of the Absolute, in the divine life itself"; Vyasa too affirms that there is an epiphany of the divine in the recurring crisis of history. Berdyaev clarifies how man should align with the divine intentionality in the continuous cleansing of history and its ultimate redemption. "In order to grasp the mystery of the 'historical', I must have a sense of it and history as something that is deeply mine, that is deeply my history, that is deeply my destiny." When Berdyaev affirms that the historical process has "its origin in the depths of the Absolute" and also adds that man should assimilate historical destiny into his own personal destiny, the profound integral meaning is that history is deity's program which can be fulfilled only by deity and man working together. But deity does not move about on the earth as a corporeal person, he can be glimpsed only deep within oneself, as the deepest self of one's self. Socrates had the same conviction and referring to it, Hannah Arendt writes: "To Socrates, the duality of the two-in-one meant no more than that if you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends."

Through roads that roved through many lands and epochs to link contemporary quest and antique perception, we have arrived at the great central image of the *Mahabharata:* Man and God, Nara and Narayana, Arjuna and Krishna, working close together for the redemption of history in the battle field of the world.

III

But perhaps we have moved too fast in mentioning the great basic image Vyasa arrived at, without a prior glance at the complex thinking on the creative method that led to it.

Before philosophy emerged as an articulate discipline, the racial psyche probed the same great issues through a poetic sensing, thus creating myth. But myths have been ambiguous and Santayana prefers the myth

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that is creatively rehandled by a poet. "A rational poet's vision would have the same moral functions that myth was asked to fulfil and fulfilled so treacherously; it would employ accurately the same ideal faculties which myth used confusedly." In the development of the Krishna story, an inferior tradition of popular legend had unduly stressed his miraculous powers. Like Bultmann in handling the Christ story, Vyasa vigorously demythologizes Krishna. But unlike Bultmann, he proceeds to re-create a purer, profoundly poetic myth which fulfils all the functions that Slochower attributed to the greatest myths of mankind. "The myth addresses itself to the problem of identity, asking, 'Who am I? And it proceeds to examine three important questions that are organically related: 'Where do I come from?: 'Where am I going?'; 'What must I do to get there?' In mythic language, the problems deal with Creation, with Destiny and with the Quest."

But the *Mahabharata* is the creation of a poet and for the novelist, dramatist and poet, the story or plot is the prime metaphor. Robert Bechthold Heilman has clarified this. "A series of dramatic statements about one subject does constitute a bloc of meaning which is a structural part of the play. This block may be understood as one of the author's metaphors. It is a metaphor just as a body of reciprocal images, with its burden of implications, is a metaphor. The dramatist's basic metaphor is his plot. All of his metaphors are valid parts of his total meaning, the search for which must include a study of the relationship among the parts. All the constituent metaphors must be related to the large metaphor which is the plot itself." Vyasa's plot is his metaphor and he has cast it in an antique mould, that of a heroic lay, a *chanson de geste.* But the Arjuna, who is paralyzed by the loss of certitude when the demand for action is most urgent, is modern man. This enduring validity of the reference to man in every epoch makes the poem an allegory in one sense. But we might keep in mind what Mark Van Doren said about the ideal allegory. "The allegory declares itself in silence. One thing is another and that is all, except that it is itself too. The mutual meanings are as immediate, and as noiseless, as communication among mirrors. The result is that the poet does not have to call our attention to what he is doing ; the poem is doing it as we read and understand." What Honig said is also worth recalling. "The progress of an allegory is spiral - virtually simultaneous in three directions, backward to the thing represented (the story, the literal description or reality), which is itself symbolic, pregnant with signification, and forward and upward to the consummation of its meaning in the whole work." It is at the critical moment of Arjuna's trauma in the battle field that the spiral progression of allegory makes its greatest upward leap to the consummation of the meaning of the whole work, while at the same time clearly referring backward to the story. This is the modality of poetry,

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revealing the universal, not as an abstraction, but as embodied in the particular. The Gita discourse, it should never be forgotten, not only redeems man but redeems the poem too. For Arjuna's trauma had frozen the action of the epic and what enables it to flow again is his recovery of his resolve. And for this recovery, a pinnacle of thought has to be ascended towards an integrative vision, because the highest insight is needed to take the decision, here and now, about confrontation of life's moral challenges or withdrawal. And that "here-and-now" applies to all locales of man and to man of all epochs.

Now we can get closer to the great tapestry woven by Vyasa to study its significant images and their meaningful webbing. Though, when Eisenstein spoke about the controlled constellation of images, he was primarily concerned with the concrete visual image, he has also discussed a more abstract value like colour and its capacity to embody the theme emotionally. But it is Belyi who has treated this more fully. In a brilliant analysis of Gogol, Belyi has studied the colour references in the former's works. Belyi's patiently collected statistical data show the yellow graph rising steadily from the joyous *Evenings in the Village* through *Taras Bulba* and making its greatest quantitative leap upward in the second volume of *Dead Souls*, where the gold is not the gold of gold plate and gold thread, but the gold of the cathedrals and crosses of the Orthodox Church. At this depth, colour has become symbol and expression of inward temper and feeling. Such an analysis, if applied to Vyasa, would reveal how frequently the bright lustre of fire glows throughout the epic, in the imagery of metaphor and simile. The aroused warrior glows like a burning pillar. surrounds an enemy warrior like the circle of fire described in space by whirling a burning brand. The battle is like the conflagration which will consume the universe at the end of a cycle of creation.

The concrete images also have this fiery energy. The uncontrollable automatism of war hysteria where the weapons themselves seem to come to life with an orgiastic desire to destroy is brought out in vivid imagery. "Though not yet pulled, the bow-string becomes taut and vibrant. The arrows rise by themselves from the quiver. Like a snake from the skin it has moulted, the sword glides out by itself from the scabbard." Arrows fly in such quick succession from Drona's bow that they seem like one long missile spanning the entire space. The onrush of soldiery towards each other and the swift advent of total carnage are expressed in one terse line. "The dust arising from the earth settled, moistened with blood."

These are in one sense images of the periphery, of the speeding surface current of the narrative. When we penetrate progressively to its depths, we find that Vyasa operates with images of increasing symbolic import and structural function. Sometimes the operation is a violent rejection of a great received image of tradition and this can disturb us

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greatly till we understand Vyasa's reasons for the rejection. The almost surrealistic image of a tree with a tap root above and branches below is found in several Upanishads and we have this fine prayer in the Rig Veda. "In the limitless region, Lord Varuna, of hallowed power, holds erect the tree's stem. The root is high above and the branches stream downward. May they sink within the secret recesses of our own being!". The image forges a link and continuity between the transcendental and material worlds in the reality of which Vyasa too has the firmest faith. Nevertheless he asks man to hew down this tree with the sword of non-attachment (Gita, XV. 1-3). The paradox becomes even more puzzling when we note how the image of the tree is linked with the Vedas in this passage: its leaves are the Vedas. But it is very clear that the reference is to the fundamentalist (Mimamsaka) reading of the Vedas as a manual of spells and rituals for getting material satisfactions on earth and for prolonging this very earthy kind of life in various assorted heavens. If this was what the Vedas really were, they were of no more use to Vyasa than a pool or well in a wholly flooded land—a familiar but telling imagery.

For expressing his conception of the relation between the transcendental and the incarnate, Vyasa found another image in tradition which, with a creative adaptation, could acquire the profound signification which the image of the inverted tree originally had but was completely lost sight of by the fundamentalists. The Katha Upanishad has this magnificent metaphor. "Know the soul as the rider, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins. The organs are the horses and the sense objects the roads for them. The soul with the body, organs and mind is designated by the sages as the relisher of experience." Man here is not a determined and transitory resultant of physical processes; he is a superordinate agent of action in command of the physical organisation that is the body. He is not an unreal appearance of the Absolute. Deity created the world to relish it and man too can rise to the capacity for such relish if he is able simultaneously to engage in action in the world and to distance himself sufficiently from the consequences of such action, which may often be tragic, to relish them aesthetically. It is clear that it is along the great lanes of the world, of history, that the rider in the Upanishadic image moves. It is in explosive conflicts, in war, in the battlefield, that the lanes of history sometimes end up, for catastrophic cleansing of corrupt ways and fresh beginnings. Thus the metaphor comes to life in the chariot of Arjuna as it rolls to the centre of the field, between the serried ranks of opposing armies. In addition to the tremendous expansion of a metaphor into the basic strutural image of a vast epic, there is another change which it is very important to note. In the Upanishadic image, the rider is alone, the charioteer being his intellect. In the epic, the charioteer is Krishna. Man has ontological autonomy; but his sojourn on

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earth will reach the goal, which is his own self-fulfilment, only if his reason is irradiated by a light from above, only if he freely aligns himself as a partner of deity in the redemption of history.

IV

Let us now look at the major images of the epic which, even if subordinate to the central image and derived from it in terms of subtly aligned import, are splendidly and meaningfully visual. The first confrontation of Karna and Arjuna at the tourney of the princes is one of the earliest of such images. Their rivalry provokes rivalry between the gods who are their progenitors. Indra sends storm clouds with thunder and lightning, rainbow and flocks of cranes in the sky and silhouettes the figure of Arjuna against this magnificent backdrop while darkening the figure of Karna with the cloud-shadow. But Surya, the sun-god, who is the progenitor of Karna, sends a shaft of light that breaks through the clouds to bathe the form of Karna in radiance. This is visually a very rich and dramatic silhouetting of the antagonists and their shadows will extend athwart the entire fabric of the vast epic, the nodal further episodes being Yudhisthira anxiously verifying that Karna is really dead, in the flickering light of tapers at night in the field, and his final realization that in slaying Karna, the Pandavas had committed fratricide.

Vyasa made the conflict an internecine one, within the same family, to suggest that all wars are fratricides and Krishna throughout counsels Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and others that the Kauravas would prosper if they treated the Pandavas like brothers which indeed they were. Duryodhana contemptuously rejected his counsel and war was the inevitable result. In the midst of it, however, there is an extraordinary and deeply moving scene. Duryodhana and Satyaki, playmates in boyhood but now deadly enemies, confront each other. They stand bemused for a while, both recalling the old days. In a moment of insight, Duryodhana regrets his own ambition of wealth and empire that has led to this confrontation in deadly combat with his dearest friend of boyhood days. But Duryodhana had always fought his own finer impulses and nemesis is a veiled presence in the thoughts and images that come to him in his last moments. "Go tell my father and mother that their son who fought fair was felled by treachery. With gross immorality, Bhima killed me in the treacherous manner one kills a man asleep, or by giving him poison." These are similes and images that surge from the unconscious, for Duryodhana had attempted to kill Bhima while he was asleep and by poisoning him. The Karmic law catches up in the end. Consciously, one may proudly ignore it, but the unconscious recognizes it.

For bringing out the self-wrought nature of Karma, finally, Vyasa

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has made a brilliant use of variations of the same image though, due to the tremendous span of the episodic action and the subtlety of the modulations, great alertness is needed to note the linkage. The dice game where the Pandavas lose everything is a crucial episode and many central motifs of the epic - the cupidity of men leading to treachery and terrible injustice, the irrepressible passion for vengeance it generates - fuse here into a stark image: Draupadi, queen of the Pandavas, clad only in one garment, being dragged by her hair to the Kaurava assembly by Dussasana. Since the insult is unforgivable and avenge has to be anticipated, this image smoulders in the unconscious mind of the old king, Dhritarashtra. Fear rather than genuine love of concord prompts him to counsel settlement when war becomes imminent. But when his sons refuse to listen to him, he says: "I weep for you all. You will be slain by the Pandavas. I see the scene right before me now: long-armed Satyaki dragging and molesting the entire Kaurava army as if it were a weak, helpless woman." The unconcious depths from which this simile springs, the image of helpless, tormented Draupadi which the king cannot exorcise, are transparent to us even if he does not consciously recall it on this occasion. The image recurs once again, when the war is lost and all the Kauravas lie dead in the field. The widowed princesses, aloof and correct even in the company of their maids-of-honour, flee to the battlefield, "with hair dishevelled and ornaments abandoned, clad only in single garments". The recurring image not only epitomizes the theme; it follows the Karmic maturation of crime as guilty fear and final retribution.

If the action of the epic opens with an image of conflict, the silhouettes of Karna and Arjuna in confrontation, it ends with an image of compassionate communion in the tragedy which was the end result of the conflict. It is a silhouette of two women, irredeemably bereaved, against the battlefield with its fallen myriad, with its pietas of mothers hugging their slaughtered sons, women demented with sorrow between the corpses of their husbands and their children. Draupadi, prostrate on the ground with grief over the loss of all her five sons, is raised and embraced by Gandhari. And poignant is the consolation offered by the elder woman, whose loss was far greater, to the woman of the opposed camp which wrought that loss. "Stop weeping, daughter Draupadi! Look at me, do you see this woman of sorrow bereft of all her hundred sons?. . . Who will console me, who share your fate?"

Every morning during the eighteen-day war, Duryodhana had gone to his mother to seek her blessings for victory, but Gandhari's response had been: "Only where ethical integrity (*dharma*) is, will victory be." She did not want any ascetic refusal of what life had to offer in terms of sustenance and security (*artha*) and sensuous-aesthetic satisfactions (*kama*). But ethical integrity should govern the pursuit of both. Vyasa too

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rejected an ascetic withdrawal from historical existence which has its legitimate demands; he believed in redeemed history and the last verse of the Gita affirms that history can indeed be redeemed and the world transformed into an order of fully established justice and well-being for all if man freely aligns himself as the partner of deity; and ethical integrity is the discipline of this partnership. Thus, the final image that abides with us, hauntingly, when we finish the epic, is that of the poet himself, silhouetted against the battlefield where almost the entire chivalric order of Bharata perished. "With uplifted hands I cry aloud: 'It is from conduct of ethical integrity (*dharma*) that economic sustenance (*artha*) and pleasure (*kama*) spring. You who desire wealth and pleasure, why is it that you are not dedicated to integrity?' But no one listens to me."

In a detailed analysis in my study of the *Mahabharata*, I have shown that Vyasa prophetically anticipated the monstrous megakill capacity of modern nuclear weaponry. With the tall, tense, figure with upraised arms directly addressing us, Kurukshetra becomes the modern world, teetering on the rim of the crater of a nuclear bomb, we mankind replace Arjuna, and Krishna steps back to let his creator come forward and fling at us the challenge of a query, a deep-probing, vast-spreading interrogation that takes in all the ends of human existence. Like Arjuna, we have to decide by ourselves how we shall answer that query. And the nature of the answer we give to the gaunt figure, silhouetted against the field with its fallen myriad in this apocalyptic image, will decide whether we are to perish or survive.

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The Buddhist Element in Modern Indian Thought and Culture

V.S. Naravane

I

(i)

The true place of Buddhism in the rich cultural heritage of India is a subject on which there has been a wide divergence of opinion among orientalists. Extreme and one-sided views have been expressed about the extent of the Buddha's own influence, and about the impact of his ideas and attitudes on the Indian tradition. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Buddhism was at first regarded as merely one of the many sects of Hinduism a sect which gradually lost its importance and faded away in the land of its birth. Then some scholars went to the other extreme of describing. Buddhism as an entirely new tradition, opposed to Hinduism on all fundamental issues. The continuity between Hinduism and Buddhism was denied, and it was asserted that India, after toying with Buddhism for a little while, found it unacceptable and banished it.

Although such extreme views are no longer expressed, books on the cultural history of India still often reveal inadequate understanding of the role of Buddhism. In the present paper, I will discuss the influence of Buddhism in the intellectual, cultural and to a limited extent social life of India in the modern age. Since the term 'modern' is vague, I should clarify that the period surveyed here is the one which lies approximately between the middle of the nineteenth century and the seventies of the twentieth. However, although our main concern will be with modern India, it seems necessary to begin with a brief assessment of the Buddhist element in Indian culture in ancient and medieval times. Such an assessment will help us in placing our subject in the proper perspective and appreciating the extent and significance of what might be called the Buddhist revival in modern India.

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(ii)

Prince Siddhartha, who later came to be known as the Buddha, was the son of King Shuddhodana and Queen Maya of Kapilavastu. His family name was Gautama, and the name of the clan was Shakya. He was probably born in 563 BC. Disillusioned by a life of worldly pleasure, and moved by sights of suffering and death, he renounced his palace at the age of twenty-nine, leaving behind him Yashodhara, his wife, and Rahula, his son. He attained enlightenment six years later under the Bodhi tree near Gaya. His first sermon was preached two months after his enlightenment at the Deer Park at Sarnath. The Buddha spent the rest of his life nearly forty-five years wandering through the villages and cities of northern and eastern India, preaching the message of selfconquest and love. He died in 483 BC at Kusinara, not far from his birthplace. Before his death his followers had been organized in the *Sangha* (Order of Monks). At first only men were admitted, but later women were also initiated and an Order of Nuns was formed.

Shortly after the Buddha's Nirvana, a council was convened at Rajagriha, presided over by Kashyapa, the oldest among his disciples. At this council, the master's teachings were arranged and classified into three main sections : the Buddha's sermons (*Sutta Pitaka*), the rules of discipline and conduct (*Vinaya Pitaka*), and discussions of philosophical and psychological questions (*Abhidhamma Pitaka*). These, together with later commentaries, comprised the scriptures of Buddhism. A hundred years later, another council was held at Vaishali to sort out differences that had arisen on theoretical as well as practical issues.

The main landmarks in the subsequent history of Buddhism may now be stated briefly. The first turning point was the conversion of Emperor Ashoka to the new faith. Ashoka sent missionaries to other countries and set up inscriptions exhorting his subjects to follow the Buddha's teachings. He also convened another council the Third Council at Pataliputra. The differences of emphasis between different sections of Buddhists first came to light at this council, leading eventually to the emergence of the Theravada and the Mahayana schools.

Ashoka died in 232 BC. The century that followed was a period of expansion and differentiation for Buddhism. The devotional element gradually became important. The Buddha was no longer looked upon merely as the supreme teacher and guide. He came to be regarded as a saviour, and in course of time was deified. In the first century AD. Kanishka, the Kushana king, convened the Fourth Buddhist Council at Takshashila (Taxila). An attempt was made to harmonize the two main schools. The attempt was not particularly successful. After the decline of the Kushana dynasty, Buddhism ceased to enjoy royal patronage. Even

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before the Kushanas established their power in north-western India, there had been a strong Brahmanical revival under the Shunga Dynasty in eastern India (Second and first centuries BC). The trend reached its culmination under the Gupta kings (fourth and fifth centuries AD). The centuries that followed saw the emergence of Hindu dynasties in different regions of India. However, as we shall see later, Buddhism continued to exercise deep influence on the religious and artistic expressions of the Indian tradition.

(iii)

Without going into the details of the Buddha's teachings, I will mention a few salient features so that the influence of Buddhism in subsequent ages may be better understood. The Buddha avoided discussing philosophical issues because his main concern was with the problem of suffering and its cause. Nevertheless, there are at least two philosophical assumptions : the law of Impermanence applied to the phenomenal world and the Law of Causation which applies as much to living beings as to material nature. He tacitly recognized a transcendental mode of Being, but refused to speculate about its nature. He ascribed suffering to "thirst" (*trishna*), the craving that makes us cling to impermanent things and that ties us to the wheel of rebirth. Through compassion, love and insight into the nature of life one can achieve an inner transformation leading to liberation, Nirvana. The Buddha pleaded for tolerance. He emphasized the inner spirit of religion rather than ritual or scriptural authority. In many of his discourses he said that there were Buddhas before him and that there would be Buddhas after him implying that he was only one among several manifestations of Divine Reality.

When we study the role of Buddhism in ancient Indian thought and culture, many interesting and instructive points arise, some of which have been unfortunately neglected. First of all, we see that the conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism was never based on rejection of either side by the other. The Buddha's starting point was the question of suffering rather than the nature of reality. He rejected the infallibility of the *Vedas*, challenged the supremacy of the Brahmins, and was silent about the concept of God in the traditional sense. These differences were naturally reflected in the sharp criticism of Buddhist ideas in the writings of the Hindu philosophers. But criticism does not imply outright rejection. The Buddha wandered from village to village for more than four decades, preaching ideas which must have been unpalatable to the orthodox Hindus. Yet no one interfered with him, nor were his followers persecuted.

Secondly, it is quite clear that Buddhism had a deep impact even on the most orthodox schools of thought. According to some scholars, the

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use of words like *maitri*, *ahimsa* and *nirvana* in the *Bhagavad-gita*, is suggestive of this influence. The idea of Avatara, Infinite Reality manifested in many human incarnations is anticipated in the Buddha's remarks quoted earlier. Even Shankaracharya, the founder of the Advaita Vedanta system and the most eminent representative of Hindu thought, seems to have had a lurking fascination for some Buddhist ideas. In fact some critics have described him as a "Buddhist in disguise".

Thirdly, it is significant that those periods in Indian history which are marked by a strong adherence to orthodox Hinduism coincide with a beautiful blossoming forth of Buddhist art and poetry. Thus kings of the Sunga and the Andhra dynasties were by no means friendly to Buddhism in their religious convictions. Yet the great Buddhist monuments of Amaravati and Sanchi belong to their regimes. Later in the "golden age of renascent Hinduism" the Gupta Period (fourth and fifth centuries AD) were produced the masterpieces of Buddhist painting at Ajanta and the great Buddha-images of Sarnath.

Fourthly, we notice that the differences between the two faiths appear radical only in the early phase of Buddhism. With the passage of time these differences narrowed down and a common meeting ground was discovered. Buddhist writers switched over from Pali to Sanskrit, and there was a continuous dialogue between them and their Hindu counterparts. The introduction of *bhakti,* and the deification of the Buddha, brought Buddhism close to Hindustan in spirit. The Buddhists evolved their own mythology in which many of the gods of the Hindu pantheon were admitted. Yoga was another bridge between the two religious : the Buddha himself is often referred to as a Mahayogi, and one one of the important schools of Buddhist thought is called Yogachara. In the philosophy of Nagarjuna, who is regarded as the most important spokesman of Mahayana thought, there is a close approximation to the basic teachings of the *Upanishads.*

Finally, it should be noted that the personality of the Buddha himself was always held in the highest respect, even when Buddhist ideas were attacked sharply at the philosophical and theological level. Even those who rejected Buddhism accepted the Buddha and admired him for his deep wisdom and moral grandeur. In course of time the Buddha was raised from the human to the divine level and was eventually accepted as one of the incarnations of Supreme Reality. In the *Puranas,* the Buddha is described as an Avatara of Vishnu. And Jayadeva, the last poet in the classical Sanskrit tradition, includes the Buddha among the ten incarnations of Vishnu. "O Keshava", he says in the invocation at the beginning of his *Gitagovindam*, "You assumed the form of Buddha and, with your heart full of compassion, condemned the Vedic practice of sacrificing living animals in religious ritual." Buddha was thus firmly established in

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the Indian religious tradition as the ninth or the last incarnation of Vishnu*.

Hinduism and Buddhism may thus be regarded as two branches of a single tree, or like two roads which sometimes run parallel to each other, then meet and become a single broad road, and again bifurcate and run parallel. The relation between the two faiths may be described through another metaphor. We sometimes see two brothers who appear to be very different from each other in their childhood and youth. One is short, the other tall; one is fair, the other dark. One brother stays at home, and other wanders away to distant lands. But when the two are middle-aged, the similarity between them gradually becomes apparent. And in their old age their inherited family traits make them look alike. Buddhism and Hinduism are like two such brothers whose family likeness is seen unmistakably in their maturity.

After the eight century A.D. the influence of Buddhism as an organised religion gradually declined in India. Buddhist monks and scholars kept the tradition alive in scattered places in monasteries and centres of learning But Buddhism had lost its appeal to the masses. Actually even during the reigns of Ashoka and Kanishka, Buddhists comprised a small minority in the total population of the country. Now the numerical strength of the new religion dwindled rapidly. But the influence of Buddhist philosophy, art and moral values continued to be deep. Much that was vital in Buddhism had already been assimilated in the culture and ethos of India. Even though the Buddhist community was small, and on the surface Buddhism seemed to have receded very much in the background, the Buddhist element continued to be relevant for the total evolution of India's spiritual and aesthetic life.

The establishment of Muslim political power at the end of the twelfth century virtually signalled the end of Buddhism as an organised religion in India. Idol worship is regarded as sinful in Islam. And when Islam embarked upon its career of expansion, the Buddha-image, which had proliferated all over Asia, became an offensive symbol of idolatry. In the Persian language, the very word *but,* derived from *'Buddha',* means idol or image. Bengal, one of the last strongholds of Buddhism, felt the terrible impact of Muslim invasion. By the time of Akbar, who followed an enlightened policy of religious toleration, Buddhism had lost much of its significance. When Akbar, in his noble quest for a universal faith, convened his religious assemblies at Fatehpur Sikri, he invited Hindu, Muslim, Christian and even Jain theologians, but the Buddhists were ignored.

Kashmir was one of the few regions where Buddhism continued to

* The tenth incarnation, Kalki, is yet to come.

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be reflected in the religious life of the people. To some extent in Bengal, too, Buddhist influence on religious rites and festivals persisted, even after the Muslim conquest. * For the rest, Buddhist ideas were taken seriously only in academic philosophical circles. Adherents of the different *darshanas,* or systems of philosophy, thought it necessary to refute the views of Buddhists. Criticism is often a tribute to the importance of the ideas criticized. Buddhism also indirectly influenced Indian thought in medieval times through the tantric element with which it was blended, particularly in Nepal and Tibet. Yoga and tantra are, in fact, two important meeting-points of Hinduism and Buddhism.

II

(i)

The rediscovery of Buddhism began at the end of the eighteenth century. After many centuries of neglect, the significance of the Buddhist element in Indian culture came to be recognized, though it was a slow process and was limited to only a few scholars. Raja Rammohan Roy, who is rightly regarded as the founder of the modern movement in Indian thought, studied Buddhist and tantric literature. He is said to have travelled in Tibet and Nepal in his youth. Little is known about these travels, but there are scattered references to Buddhism in his writings which indicate that he probably visited many monasteries and had personal contacts with Buddhist monks. Rammohan was one of the pioneers of the study of comparative religion; and when the Brahmo Samaj was founded, he introduced the practice of reciting passages from the scriptures of all major religions, including Buddhism.

The real credit for focussing attention on Buddhism, however, goes to a band of researchers and scholars — Indian and western many of whom dedicated their entire lives to a painstaking study of Pali and Sanskrit texts, translating and editing them with great care. The number of Western scholars in this field is very large. I will mention only a few outstanding names here. Before I do so, I would like to point out two remarkable features of their work. First the rapidity with which the entire Buddhist tradition, in all its aspects, was uncovered. At the end of the eighteenth century, very little was known about Buddhist philosophical or religious literature. Not only in the West, but even in India, there was deep ignorance of Buddhist texts. Within half a century the picture was transformed.

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*Dilip Kumar Barua, in his essay on 'The Legacies of Buddhism in Bengal', has given some interesting examples of the the persistence of Buddhist influence in day to-day religious life. *Aspects of Buddhism,* Sikkim Institute of Tibetology and Other Buddhist Studies, Chapter 20.

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Secondly, the cosmopolitan nature of the movement for the revival of interest in Buddhism. Scholars from almost all the countries of Europe made their contributions. Even a brief list would include outstanding scholars from England, America, France, Germany, Italy, Holland and Russia.

Some of the early Indologists, like William Jones, Colebrooke and Winternitz gave some attention to Buddhism, though their main interest was Hindu scriptures. George Turnour was one of the first to give specialized attention to Buddhism. He studies Ashoka's Pali edicts and his interest was aroused when he saw some Pali texts in Sri Lanka in which there were clear references to Ashoka. Turnour published a translation of *Mahavamsa* in 1837. Meanwhile, B.H. Hodgson had collected many Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal and was busy editing them. Csoma de Koros was the first to draw attention to the importance of Tibetan Buddhism. He published the first Tibetan-English dictionary in 1834. Influenced by the work of Hodgson and Csoma de Koros, the French scholar Eugene Burnouf wrote his epoch-making book *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* in 1844. Originally written in French, it was soon translated into English and aroused widespread interest. Burnouf, who was primarily a Sanskrit rather than a Pali scholar, translated several Mahayana texts including *Divyāvadāna* and *Vajrasūchī*. He wrote commentaries on *Lankāvatāra* and *Prajnāpāramitā* sutras. His French translation of *Saddharmapundarīka* was published in 1852 under the title *Lotus de la Bonne Loi* (Lotus of the Good Law).

While Burnouf specialized in Sanskrit texts, Vincent Fausboll of Copenhagen returned to Pali literature. He translated the *Dhammapada* into Latin in 1855, and the *Suttanipāta* into English in 1881. The latter was published in the *Sacred Books of the East* series founded by Max Mueller. Fausboll's greatest contribution was his English translation of the Pali *Jātakas* in six volumes, published between 1877 and 1897. Another important name is that of Hermann Oldenberg, a German scholar, who learnt Sanskrit and Pali at an early age and devoted all his energies to Buddhist studies. He translated the voluminous *Vinaypitaka* (1879-83) and tried to establish a correlation between Upanishadic dialogues and the Buddha's dialogues with his disciples. Among the other Pali works edited and translated by him, special importance is attached to *Dipavamsa Chullavagga* and *Mahavagga*. Oldenberg's *The Buddha* was the first comprehenssive study of the Buddha based entirely on Pali texts. It became immensely popular in German and English editions.

I will refer to only a few other scholars whose contributions are so valuable that they must find a place even in a brief essay like this. H. Kern of Leyden (Holland) translated Aryashura's *Jātakamālā*- the Sanskrit version of the Jataka stories - in 1896. Kern also published *A Manual of*

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Indian Buddhism which remains even today an important reference book. The Frenchman Louis de la Valee Poussin edited and translated the Tibetan as well as the Sanskrit text of *Dashabhūmikasutra*, and the Sanskrit text of Nagarjuna's *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*, one of the basic works of Mahayana philosophy. Theodore Tscherbatsky of Russia specialized in Buddhist logic and edited Chandrakirti's commentaries on Mahayana texts on logic. Among American scholars, two deserve special mention : Burlingame, for his *Buddhist Legends*; and Warren, for his *Buddhism in Translations*. The latter is still regarded as the best anthology of selections from representative Pali and Sanskrit texts on the entire Buddhist tradition. Professor T.W. Rhys David was perhaps the most distinguished and influential of all the western scholars who helped in the revival of interest in Buddhism. His own curiosity was first awakened when he joined the Ceylon Civil Service in 1864 and saw the deep impact of the Buddha's personality and ideas on the life of the people. He soon became proficient in Pali and, on his return to England, collaborated with Oldenberg and Fausboll in editing Buddhist texts. His book, *Buddhism*, was received with enthusiasm and he was invited on a lecture tour to America where he founded the Pali Text Society in 1881. He was associated with the Society for more than forty years, translating, editing and publishing Buddhist texts. He travelled in India frequently and, from the point of view of the Buddhist revival in India, few books have proved more influential than his *Buddhist India*. In collaboration with William Stede, he started preparing a monumental Pali-English dictionary. Three parts of the dictionary were completed in his lifetime, and the remaining volumes were published later by Stede. Rhys David has been described as "the Max Mueller of Buddhism". His wife, Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids, was a worthy companion to him. She translated the *Theri Gatha (Psalms of the Sisters)*, the *Visuddhimagga* and many other Pali texts. Her most ambitious work, however, was a translation of the difficult and abstract *Abhidhamma pitaka*. After her husband's death, Mrs Rhys Davids carried on the work of the Pali Text Society for many years.

(ii)

While paying a tribute to the western scholars mentioned above for their valuable contributions to the study of Buddhism, it should be recognized that their works were read mainly by specialists in philosophy, comparative religion, philology and other fields. We must therefore turn to the researches and publications of Indian scholars who were able to create a real excitement about Buddhism among larger sections of readers than the western writers.

Much of the specialized work of Indian scholars, too, was published

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in English. As early as 1882, Rajendralal Mitra published his essays on Nepalese Buddhist literature. The Buddhist Text Society was founded in Calcutta in 1892. Later, the Society started publishing a journal in which many important writings of Indian Buddhist scholars were first published. Among these were Sarat Chandra Das and his pupil Satish Chandra Vidyabhushan. Das was not only a fine scholar and prolific writer but also an explorer who travelled extensively in Tibet and central Asia. He brought to light many important Buddhist texts which had been given up as "lost". Some of the lectures of Sarat Chandra Das were collected together in a fascinating volume entitled *Indian Pandits in the Lands of Snow.* Satish Chandra Vidyabhushan is best remembered for his *History of Indian Logic,* in which Buddhist logic, represented by Dignaga, Chandrakirti and Nagarjuna, has been given a prominent place.*

Even more significant for the popularization of Buddhism were the works written by many accomplished scholars in Indian languages. Of these, only three will be mentioned here. Hara Prasad Sastri, a contemporary and a collaborator of Rajendralal Mitra, was one of the first scholars in modern India to write about Buddhism in an Indian language. His *Bauddha Doha O Gan* (Buddhist Poems and Songs) in Bengali awakened the non-English reader to the cultural significance of Buddhist literature.

Dharmananda Kosambi was another remarkable scholar who wrote many books on the Buddha and Buddhism in Marathi and Gujarati. Kosambi, a fine scholar of Pali and Sanskrit, became a Buddhist monk and spent a few years in Sri Lanka. Then he went to America and edited many Buddhist texts including *Visuddhimagga*. Kosambi was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and joined the National University founded in Gujarat at Gandhiji's suggestion. Later, he became Professor of Pali at the Fergusson College, Poona.

Rahula Sankrityayana was the most prolific as well as the most popular among those scholars who wrote about Buddhism in Indian languages. Rahulji (as he is popularly referred to) had an extraordinary career. He started as an ardent follower of the Arya Samaj but later became a Buddhist monk and travelled extensively all over India, and in Tibet, China, Mongolia and Russia. He had a remarkable flair for languages and knew Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and many central Asian languages. During his explorations in Tibet he discovered many rare Pali texts and transcribed them in the Devanágari script.+ He translated into Hindi

*I would like to refer to three other books written in English by Indian Buddhist scholars : B.C.Law's *History of Pali Literature* (2 Volumes); Benoytosh Bhattacharya's *Buddhist Iconography* ; and B.M.Barua's *History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy* which helped readers to place Buddhist thought in the proper perspective.

+One of Rahulji's collaborators, Ananda Kausalyayana, was also a highly successful Buddhist writer in Hindi. He translated more than five hundred *Jataka* stories and published them in six volumes.

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almost the whole of *Khuddaka Nikaya* and the entire *Majjhima Nikaya*. He wrote several books about the Buddha and Buddhism in Hindi, including *Buddhacharya* (a life of the Buddha along with selections from the Buddha's discourses); and *Baudha Darshana*, an introduction to Buddhist philosophy. Rahulji's books became immensely popular and brought Buddhist literature within the reach of thousands of Hindi readers who were not conversant with the English language. However, his work suffers from two limitations: (1) he did not pay much attention to Mahayana; and (ii) his interpretations of Buddhist theories were sometimes one sided because of his strong Marxist predilections. But in spite of these limitations, Rahula Sankrityayana will long be remembered for his popular expositions of Buddhism, especially because he wrote in a very simple, clear and interesting prose style, enlivened by anecdotes, digressions and personal recollections.

(iii)

The scholarly work described in the foregoing paragraphs prepared the background for a revival of interest in Buddhism. The neglect of Buddhism in the preceding generations was not so much the result of prejudice or indifference as of lack of information. This lacunae was to some extent overcome by the many sided presentation of Buddhism by western and Indian scholars.

Before we conclude,attention should be drawn to some other factors which, in varying degrees, promoted the interest in, and understanding of, Buddhism. First of all, a reference should be made to the exciting discoveries made by archaeologists and art historians like Princep, Cunningham, Marshall, Fergusson, Havell, Percy Brown and others. Identification of ancient sites like Shravasti, Vaishali, Kusinara, Kapilavastu and Lumbini brought to light the life and personality of the Buddha from the realm of legend to that of reality. The imagination of sensitive Indians was stirred by the knowledge that they could now tread exactly the same path which the Buddha had trodden, or visit the precise spot where the Buddha had utttered his last words before attaining nirvana, twenty-five centuries ago. Similarly, the excavations at Nalanda,Rajgir, Nagarjunkonda, Sanchi and other sites created a sense of pride in the high level of education and art inspired by the Buddha's life and teachings. These discoveries helped to emphasize the continuity of Buddhism with the rest of the Indian tradition.

Another factor was the gradual reopening of communications with the countries of Southeast Asia and China and Japan.* India's ties with

*As will be noted in the next section, Rabindranath Tagore's visits to China , Japan and South-East Asia played an important part in this process.

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078107

these countries in ancient times had been to a considerable extent, associated with the spread of Buddhism. After centuries of isolation, India once again rediscovered these cultural ties. As the number of scholars and pilgrims visiting Buddhist sites in India increased year by year, Indians were impressed by the fact that millions of people in Asia regarded India as the "Holy Land" – the land where the Buddha lived and died. With this came the realization that the Buddha belonged first and foremost to India, and that places like Sarnath and Bodh Gaya could offer peace and inspiration not merely to Buddhists but to all Indians irrespective of religious affiliation.

The growth of the Theosophical Movement also helped, though indirectly, to focus attention on Buddhism. The Theosophists did not reach out to the masses. But they exercised considerable influence on urban intellectuals. In the writings of Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant and other Theosophists, many Buddhist ideas were discussed and Buddhist terms were freely used. There was a time when Theosophists held weekly meetings in almost every Indian city, and during the lectures and discussions at these meetings, the role of Buddhism in the spiritual evolution of India was often stressed.

It seems appropriate at this point to make a brief reference to Swami Vivekananda, whose boundless admiration for the Buddha made a deep impression on those Indians who wanted to understand their spiritual heritage in its entirety. Vivekananda was one of the most dynamic and powerful personalities produced by India in the nineteenth century. His views carried much weight, particularly among the youth. Vivekananda, who was firmly committed to the Hindu tradition as represented by Advaita Vedanta, accepted the Buddha with enthusiasm. "Lord Buddha is my *Ishta*,* my God", he said in a lecture. "He preached no theory about Godhead. He was himself God. I fully believe it." Vivekananda praised Buddha for his ideal of selfless service, for condemning excessive preoccupation with external ritual, and for "bringing the highest religion out of the monopoly of Brahmins". Once he went to the extent of saying that "the Budha was the greatest man that has ever been born in the world". He insisted on the inseparable connection between Buddhism and Hinduism. "The separation of the Buddhist and the Brahmin has been the cause of India's downfall," he said. He exhorted Indians to "join the wonderful intellect of Shankaracharya with the heart, the noble soul, the amazing humanizing power of Buddha, the Great Master".

**Ishta:* One's own personal deity.

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III

(i)

I now turn to the writings of three outstanding representatives of Indian culture and thought in the modern age : Ananda Coomaraswamy, Saravepalli Radhakrishnan, and Rabindranath Tagore. All three of them emphasized the positive and creative role of Buddhism in the Indian tradtiton, and removed many misconceptions about the Buddha's teachings. They were drawn towards to Buddhism from different directions. Coomaraswamy was an art—historian and a meticulous researcher in cultural history. Radhakrishnan was a trained philosopher, thoroughly equipped to assess the impact of Buddhism in the various fields of technical philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore, though known primarily as a poet and a creative artist, was also a philosopher, though not in the technical sense. It is largely through the cumulative influence of these three men that Indians of the twentieth century have come to appreciate the tremendous spiritual and cultural significance of the Buddha's personality and teachings.

I will begin with Ananda Coomaraswamy. Born of a Sinhalese father and an English mother, Coomaraswamy's education and interests led him to the comparative studies of Indian and western cultures. Buddhism has always been a living religion and a way of life in Sri Lanka — a way of life in which the Hindu and the Buddhist elements are inseparably blended. The Coomaraswamys were Tamil-speaking Hindus settled in Sri Lanka. But Ananda's father, Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy, was a Buddhist scholar and translated two Pali Buddhist texts — *Dathavamsa* and *Sutta Nipata* — into English. The very name Ananda has Buddhist associations. It was the name of the Buddha's closest disciple.

Ananda Coomaraswamy published several books devoted exclusively to Buddhism, and others in which Buddhist art and philosophy are the main themes. I will mention some of these books in greater detail a little later. But the extent of Coomaraswamy's contribution to Buddhist scholarship can be glimpsed from the titles of some of his research papers. Here are a few, listed in the order of their publication: "Mahayana Buddhist Images from Ceylon and Java"; Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1909;" The Gods of Mahayana Buddhism" Burlington Magazine, 1915; "Buddhist Primitives", Burlington Magazine, 1916; "Buddhist Art in Asia: Its Origin and Development", Asia Magazine, 1919; "Nepalese Buddhist Painting", Siamese Bronzes and "Khmer Sculpture" (all published in the Bulletin of the Boston Museum, 1920); "Buddhist Sculpture" and "Gandhara Sculpture", Bulletin of the Boston Museum, 1924 and 1925; "Buddhist Sculptures from Mathura" Bulletin of the Boston Museum, 1927;

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"Origin of the Buddha Image" (Art Bulletin, 1927); "The Buddha's Chuda" and "Some Early Buddhist Reliefs Identified", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1928; "Buddhist Reliefs From Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati" Rupam, 1929; "Sculptures From Bodh Gaya", Arts Asiatica, 1935; "Rebirth and Omniscience in Pali Buddhism", Indian Culture, 1936. "Tathāgata" Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, 1938; *"Nirmāna Kāya"*, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1938; "The Reinterpretation of Buddhism", New Indian Antiquary, 1939.

I will now make a brief reference to Coomaraswamy's books devoted wholly or mainly to Buddhism. *Myths of the Hindus and the Buddhists* (Harrap and Co., 1914) was published in collaboration with Sister Nivedita.* This is probably the first book on Indian mythology in which myths and legends other than those belonging to the Hindu tradition have been included. The myths have been retold in a delightfully simple and interesting manner. Some of the legends about Prince Siddharatha's childhood (for instance, his dispute with his cruel cousin, Devadatta, as to who was the rightful claimant for the possession of a wounded dove), are extremely moving. The aim of this work is to show that legends about the Buddha like the legends about Rama, Krishna, Arjuna and other Hindu gods and heroes express in a concrete, intelligible form the abstract concepts of philosophy, and the ideals of religion and ethics.

Two years after *Myths of the Hindus and the Buddhists*, Coomaraswamy published *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (Harrap and Co., 1916). The book immediately became popular and was praised as one of the finest general introductions to the life and teachings of the Buddha. The account of the Buddha's life is based not only on Pali sources like *Nidānakathā* and *Lalitavistara* but also on Ashvaghosha's *Buddha charita*, which is regarded as one of the great classics of Sanskrit poetry. Coomaraswamy's comments on Ashvaghosha are worth quoting: He has the saga-teller's power of calling up a vivid picture in a few words. He understands the heavy toil of the peasant and the pure dignity of unsophisticated girlhood. Coomaraswamy, like Ashvaghosha, paints with firm lines and delicate hues not only the hero of the story but the minor characters in the intensely moving drama of Tathagata's life. Many well-konwn western scholars have mentioned that they were first attracted towards the study of Buddhism only after reading Coomaraswamy's book.+

The other two books worth noting on art are : *History of Indian*

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*Nivedita was the adopted name of Margaret Noble, a devoted disciple of Swami Vivekananda.

+Among them are Professor A.L. Basham , the renowned Indologist, and Christmas Humphreys, President of the British Buddhist Society and author of many books on Buddhism.

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and Indonesian Art (Weyhe, 1927); and *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (Harvard University Press, 1935). The first is a pioneering work in which the continuity of the entire Hindu-Buddhist tradition in South-east Asia has been brought out through perceptive comments on some of the great masterpieces of architecture and sculpture. Although only Indonesia is mentioned in the title, the survey includes Thailand, Burma and some other countries of the reigion. The second is a more specialized study and reveals Coomaraswamy's profound knowledge of Buddhist sculpture in all its aspects — symbolism, technique, composition.

Hinduism and Buddhism (Wisdom Library, 1943) was published only five years before Coomaraswamy's death and contains his most mature thoughts on the two religious and philosophical expressions of a single tradition. This tiny volume of about eighty pages has more than four hundred notes, each of which — as a western scholar put it is significant enough to inspire a doctoral thesis. Coomaraswamy points out that Buddhism and Hinduism are the only two metaphysical disciplines that have survived as authentic forms of the *Philosophia Perennis*— the perennial philosophy "embodying those universal truths to which no one people or age can make an exclusive claim". About the unity of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, Coomaraswamy says: "The more superficially one studies Buddhism, the more it seems to differ from the Hinduism from which it originated; the more profound our study, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish Buddhism from Brahmanism, or to say in what respects Buddhism is really unorthodox."

As for the doctrine of "no soul" *(anatta)*. Coomaraswamy points to the Buddha's own emphatic assertion that he "never taught the annihilation of an essence", and that the only entity denied is the finite personality wrongly identified with the Universal Principle, the Ego-centre which is expected somehow to survive the death of the body and which is popularly known as the "soul". The Buddha did not deny the Self - the *Atman*- of the *Upanishads*. Indeed, Coomaraswamy points out that the teachings to all religions, including Buddhism, are implicitly centered around the notion of a universal Self or spirit. "We are forced by the logic of the scriptures themselves," he says, "to recognize that Agni, Indra, Budha, Krishna, Moses and Christ are names of one and the same 'descent' whose birth is eternal; to recognize that all scripture, without exception, requires of us in positive terms to know our Self, and by the same token to know what-is-not-ourself but is mistakenly called a 'self" (*Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 74).

Apart from these books, in which the Buddha and Buddhism claim a substantial part of the author's attention, many other major works of Coomaraswamy show the deep significance he attached to the Buddhist element in Indian culture. His famous collection of essays, entitled

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The Dance of Shiva and *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, bear this out. In these two volumes, and in *The Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* the book specifically devoted to aesthetics. Coomaraswamy chooses his illustrations from Buddhist as well as Hindu sources. This distinguishes his aesthetic writings from those of other Indian aestheticians whose illustrative references are derived almost exclusively from the classical Sanskrit *kāvya* especially Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* and *Meghadūta* or from the Rāmāyana of Valmiki.

(ii)

While Ananda Coomaraswamy came to Buddhism through his work as an art - historian, Radhakrishnan started as an academic philosopher. His *Indian Philosophy* retains its popularity even to this day-sixty years after its publication. In two chapters devoted to Buddhism, in this book, Radhakrishnan has tried to bring out the persistent concepts and attitudes that Hinduism and Budhism have in common. Radhakrishnan was blessed with a felicitous style, and his exposition of the Buddha's teachings, and of the philosophies they inspired, contains many memorable phrases that have often been quoted. This literary quality can also be seen in his popular book. *Gautama, The Buddha;* and in his beautiful translation of the *Dhamm:apada*.

In his *Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy*, co-authored by Professor Charles Moore of Hawaii University, Radhakrishnan has offered a very judicious selection from the Buddha's discourses and from Pali and Sanskrit texts. Equal weight has been given to Theravada and Mahayana, and all important viewpoints are represented within the basic framework of Buddhist thought. In the editorial note preceding the section on Budhism, Radhakrishnan says : "The Buddha takes up some of the thoughts of the Upanishads and gives to them a new orientation. The Buddha is not so much formulating a new scheme of metaphysics and morals as rediscovering an old norm and adapting it to the new conditions of thoughts and life." On the question of the Buddha's alleged rejection of Ultimate Reality, Radhakrishnan says : "While the Buddha is not prepared to dogmatize on these issues, it would be improper to look upon him as a sceptic, or an agnostic, or an atheist." Radhakrishnan points out that the Buddha is silent on the nature of Self or Nirvana because he is mainly interested in the "ethical remaking of man" and feels that metaphysical disputes would "take us away from the task of individual change". His silence is "not a cloak for ignorance or scepticism. Whereof we cannot speak we must keep silent. This is the great tradition of the mysticism of the Upanishads".

Radhakrishnan points out that, with a change of emphasis, the

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Mahayana reintroduces the concept of Absolute Reality about which the Hinayana thinkers were silent; that the Mahayana ideal of the *Bodhisattava* supplements the Hinayana ideal of the *Arhat*; that the idea of the Adibuddha corresponds to the Saguna Brahman or Ishvara in Hinduism. Some of these ideas were expressed by Radhakrishnan with great eloquence in his speeches delivered at universities in India, the UK and the USA and at meetings convened by the Unesco and various cultural organizations all over the world. His presentations of Buddhism as a variant within the larger framework of the Indian tradition were marked by deep sensitiveness to the aesthetic and cultural – not merely the ethical, religious and philosophical – aspects of the Buddha's life and teachings. Because of his success in interpreting the East to the West, and vice versa, he has been described as a"cultural liaison officer" and a "bridge builder". It is important to remember, however, that he was a bridge-builder not only between the Buddhist and the Hindu expressions of India's consciousness which were erroneously seen in their separateness.

The 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's nirvana was commemorated all over India in May 1956.* Radhakrishnan, the then President of India, presided over the main function at Delhi: In his speech he paid a moving tribute to the Buddha – "India's noblest son" – for the moral grandeur of his personality and the profound impact of his teachings upon the mind and heart of India. He also wrote a foreword to the volume of studies in Buddhism published on that occasion.** In this Foreword Radhakrishnan sums up the different sides of the Buddha's nature, and the different currents of thought they inspired. He quotes the Buddha's own words:

"I have, O monks, seen an ancient way, an ancient road followed by the wholly awakened ones of olden times. . . . Along that way have I gone." Buddhism is thus taken not only as essentially in harmony with "India's way" but with the universal "way of wisdom".

Radhakrishnan sees the Buddha's role as constructive in the best sense of the term. Rejecting extreme asceticism, the Buddha preached the Middle Path. The true ascetic is one "who has his heart in his power, and is not himself in the power of his heart". Self-control and conquest of desire is only one aspect of perfection. "The Buddha also taught us to pursue *prajnā*, transcendental knowledge, and practise *karunā*, compassion." Radhakrishnan rejects the conception of Buddhism as a deterministic

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(a)*Historians generally accept 483 B.C. as the date of the Buddha's Nirvana. But Theravada Buddhists accept 544 B.C. Selection of the date for commemorating the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's Nirvana was based on the Theravada preference of 544 B.C.

*(b)**2500 Years of Buddhism* Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India.

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or life-denying creed. "The Buddha does not adopt a fatalistic view," he points out. "He does not say that man has no control over his future. He can work out his future and attain Nirvāna . The Buddha was an ardent exponent of the strenuous life. Our aim is to conquer time, overcome *samsāra*, and the way to it is the moral path which results in illumination."

One of the persistent misconceptions about the Buddha is that his outlook on life was extremely austere and that he was indifferent to the aesthetic side of life. Radhakrishnan refers to many episodes in the Buddha's life which show his appreciation of the beauty of nature and of the simple joys of human life. For instance, as he was taking leave of the city of Vaishali, a few months before his *pari* nirvāna, he rested on one of the neighbouring hills and, looking at the pleasant scenery with its many shrines and sanctuaries, he said to his favourite disciple, Ananda :"Chitram jambudvīpam... manoramam jīvitam manushyānām" ("Colourful is India, enchanting is the life of human beings")*. On another occasion Radhakrishnan referred to a significant dialogue between the Buddha and Ananda. Once Ananda was chided by some of his puritanical fellow-monks for saying that "Half of the *Dharma* consists of contemplation of Beauty ". Ananda approached the Master and asked whether he had done anything wrong in making that remark, "Yes , Ananda, you *have* done something wrong", said the Buddha. "It is not *half* of *Dharma* that consists of contemplation of beauty, but the *whole* of it".

(iii)

There was a time when Rabindranath Tagore was remembered primarily for his achievement as a creative artist in the varied fields of poetry, drama, fiction, music and painting. In recent years, however, the significance of Tagore as a thinker is also being realized. Some of his lectures in England and America, originally delivered in English, have been collected together in volumes entitled *Personality*,*Sadhana* and *Creative Unity*.Most of Tagore's references to the Buddha and Buddhism occur in his Bengali essays and his discourses at Santiniketan+. Only a few of these have been translated into English, one of them being a long essay entitled *A Vision of Indian History*. In this essay Tagore has described the formative role of Buddhism in India's national evolution.

No other Indian philosopher of the modern age has written or

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*Quoted by Radhakrishnan from the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*. In ancient mythology, the Indian sub-continent was often referred to as Jambudvipa.

+Selections from Tagore's comments on Buddhism, along with a few poems on Buddhist themes,have been collected in a slender volume published by Visva-Bharati about fifteen years after Tagore's death.

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spoken about the Buddha with such admiration and reverence as Tagore has done. He was fascinated by the Buddha's personality at an early age. The fascination became stronger when he travelled extensively in countries like China, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia where Buddhism was and in most cases still is a living force moulding the life and culture of the people. The poems and plays written by Tagore on Buddist themes will be referred to in a later section. Here I will quote some of Tagore's comments on issues about which the Buddha's views have often been misunderstood.

Like the *Upanishads,* says Tagore, the ideas of the Buddha 'have generated two divergent currents of thought – the one impersonal, preaching abnegation of the self through discipline; and the other personal, preaching the cultivation of sympathy for all creatures and devotion to the infinite truth of love.The latter,represented by the Mahayana, had its origin in the positive aspect of the Buddha's teaching, which is immeasurable love.It could never, by any logic, find its reality in the Emptiness of the truthless abyss"+.Refusing to see in Buddhism a doctrine of inaction or nihilism, Tagore says: "The Buddha condemned activity only if it led to evil in thought, word or deed. He preached extinction not of the active self but only of pride, ignorance and lust".In his educational essays Tagore makes frequent references to the great Buddhist Universities of Nalanda and Vikramashila where thousands of students from many lands received a many-sided and systematically planned education. imparted in a spirit of complete tolerance for all-creeds and viewpoints.

Two of Tagore's Bengali essays on Buddhism deserve special mention. In Brahmavihāra(Dwelling in the divine), the Poet makes some very insightful comments on Buddhist ethics. He discusses the different virtues which contribute to the totality of righteous conduct or *shīla* according to the Buddha. Important as they are, Tagore points out, neither religious piety nor moral rectitude can be regarded as the ultimate point. Even the good may be associated with some purpose or aim, like happiness or approbation. The only thing devoid of any purpose is pure, selfless love. Even the good , therefore, is to be regarded as instrumental, because it is functional. Ethical perfection is the stepping stone to Love, not an end in itself*.

In another essay, *Bauddhadharme Bhaktivada* (Devotionalism in the Buddhist Faith) the same idea of Love transcending even goodness is expressed in the context of the evolution of Buddhism from the Hinayana to the Mahayana sect. So deep is the human need for a divine object of adoration and love, Tagore points out, that the deification of the Buddha

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+*Creative Unity* , Macmillan, p. 71

**Brahmavihar* was first published in a collection of Tagore's discourses entitled Santiniketan (Vol. 1).

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was inevitable. In India, western scholars of the nineteenth century emphasized the Hinayana tradition for a long time, partly because Pail texts were studied and Sanskrit texts were ignored. The result was that Indians, while rediscovering Buddhism, tended to regard it as an ethical system rather than a heart warming religion answering the emotional requirements of human nature. "Ethical righteousness may be good as a medicine, but it cannot be a substitute for food." Only love can nourish our inner spirit.

I will translate a paragraph from this essay in which Tagore stresses that the devotional aspect was implicit in Buddhism from the very beginning . "Actually, it was in the Buddhist religion that, for the first time, a specific individual was seen as someone more than human. In the eyes of his devotees, the founder of this religion transcended all natural boundaries and shone forth in his uniqueness. He was never merely a teacher of unusual power.He was the embodiment of Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Compassion. Though he was free, he accepted bonds in order to save all living beings from Suffering. These bonds were not the result of past *Karmas.* They were wilfully accepted by him through Love, through Sympathy."

IV

(i)

Let us now see how the renewed interest in Buddhism, and the new understanding of the spiritual significance of the Buddha's personality and life, are reflected in modern Indian art and literature.

Buddhism did not have much impact on music and dance even in ancient India. However, classical Indian art, architecture, painting and above all sculpture exemplify the influence of the Buddha . But in the modern age there are hardly any specimens of architecture that can be attributed to the outstanding creative works in the tradition of Buddhist art. A number of stupas and viharas sprung up at important Buddhist centres, especially at Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Sanchi. They point to the untapped possibilities of the *chaitya*-arch, the parapet walls in which stones-slabs are used for creating the appearance of wooden beams, and other features of ancient Buddhist architecture. Many of these new structures have been built in non-Indian architectural style — Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Nepalese. After the establishment of the Mahabodhi Society some new viharas have also been built in the traditional Indian style at Bombay, Delhi and some other cites. Among these new Buddhist temples, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath is the most attractive. It is saturated with the serene atmosphere of Buddhism. The inner walls are adorned with murals by Japanese artists showing the life of the Buddha in a series of panels.

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Some private houses have been built by people who had a deep feeling for Buddhism. This feeling is expressed through the introduction of architraves and stone fences in the style of the Gateways of the great stupa at Sanchi. Several Buddhist motifs are employed : conventionalized lotus-patterns etched in stone: combination of the wheel and solar disc; and concentric circles suggesting the unrolling of a scroll. The introduction of these Sanchi motifs in the simple homes of ordinary people — not necessarily Buddhists is an interesting example of the renewal of Buddhist influence in Indian life.

In sculpture, again, we must concede that the fascination for the Buddha's personality has not yet resulted in the creation of any outstanding works of art in the modern age. Replicas of well-known Buddha heads of the Sarnath and Mathura schools, in clay or plaster, are quite popular at places of Buddhist pilgrimage like Bodh Gaya, Sanchi and Sarnath. Recently small metal sculptures of Mahayana deities-particularly Tara have also come into vogue. These are made by Nepalese or Tibetan craftsmen. But on the whole, Buddhist sculpture, which once attained glorious height has not yet shown any signs of revival in modern India.

It is in painting that the new interest in Buddhism has found spontaneous expression. Almost all the painters of the Bengal school turned to the Buddha's life as one of the main sources of their inspiration. Gaganendranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore,Asit Kumar Haldar,and later Nand Lal Bose delved into Buddhist legend and produced some fine works. *At one time it had become fashionable among certain art circles to belittle the work of the Bengal artists as "revivalist", "sentimental" and "hazy". But one has only to see some of their paintings on Buddhist themes to realize that these paintings are not "sentimental" but sensitive. They have expressed, gracefully and skillfully, the tenderness and spiritual loftiness of a tradition on which the Buddha has left the stamp of his personality.

I will describe in some detail the Buddhist paintings of only one of these artists : Nandlal Bose. An accomplished draughtsman with a fine sense of composition, Nandlal Bose brings to his subject all his technical skill combined with a deep understanding of the human side of the Buddha legend. He was a disciple of Abanindranath Tagore and was closely associated with the poet Rabindranath, at whose invitation he took charge of the Art School and Museum at Shantiniketan. Under the influence of both these preceptors, he acquired an abiding love and reverence for the Buddha. In his interpretation of the Buddha's life, Nandlal often departs

*Another modern Indian artist who has handled the Buddha theme with great success is Kanu Desai. He made a series of beautiful pen-and-ink sketches depicting episodes from the life of the Buddha. Some of these were published in the form of an album and became very popular.

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from the traditional account . For instance, in the nativity scene he shows Queen Maya Devi attended by two maidens. In the Sanchi panels, and in many other representations, the Queen is shown unattended and is bathed by elephants from the forest who, sensing the birth of a Saviour, fill their trunks with water and approach the Queen . In Nandlal's picture, the newborn child is shown appearing like a rising sun, resplendent in his perfection.

In his depiction of the Buddha's *Pari-nirvana,* Nandlal Bose is closer to the traditional account. The Tathagata is recumbent on his right side, his head resting on the palm of his hand, in the shade of two mighty *shāl* trees. It is the night of the full moon in the month of *Vaishakha.* The *shāl* trees have blossomed forth out of season, anticipating the Buddha's moment of Great Liberation. The shrubbery in the background and foregound is painted in sombre colours. A range of hills is dimly visible in the distance. Behind the hills, the full moon has risen, casting a mellow light on the Buddha's serene face. Half-hidden by one of the trees we see the sad figure of Ananda, the faithful disciple.

Some of the other episodes painted by Nandlal are : Sujata offering a dish of rice-pudding to Prince Siddhartha, who has become emaciated through fasting and other austerities; the courtesan Ambapali of Vaishali visits the Buddha in a grove outside the city and invites him to her house for a meal ; the Buddha returns to the earth after his sojourn in the celestial realm, where he had gone to preach the Dharma to his mother, Maya Devi; and the Buddha, bidding a silent farewell to his quest for Enlightenment . Nandlal's treatment of the Great Renunciation theme is superb. It is the night of the full moon. In keeping with the nocturnal atmosphere, the colours in this pictures are soft and subdued. The Prince is mustachioed and wears ear-pendants. His attire is simple, but his locks are elegantly plaited and are crowned with a diadem Clestial beings support the hoofs of Kanthaka, the horse so that the sound may be smothered and the place guards may not be awakened. The vegetation outside the palace is suggested by patches of grass. The picture is beautifully composed, the massive palace-coloumn balancing the octagonal arrangement.

Some other Buddhist themes selected by modern Indian painters are : the court astrologer tells King Shudhodana that Prince Siddhartha will renounce the worldly life in search of wisdom; the witnessing of the signs of suffering by Siddhartha; the taming of the intoxicated elephant, Nalagiri, by the Buddha; return of the Buddha to Kapilavastu; the initiation of Rahula into the order of monks; the stuggle of Siddhartha against Mara, the Evil One, under the Bodhi Tree, the remorse of King Ashoka after the Kalinga war and his conversion to Buddhism. Apart from well-known painters, amateur artists are instinctively turning to the Buddha's life for selecting their themes. This tendency can be seen among teach-

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ers and students of art at various art schools and departments of art in universities. It is interesting to note that sometimes artists try to introduce the Buddhist spirit in portraits of Mahatma Gandhi. The Mahatma is depicted as the Buddha of the modern age always on the move, a selfless messenger of peace and love.

(ii)

The creative expression of the Buddhist element in India's national culture can be seen more clearly in literature than in any other field, so far as the modern age is concerned. In poetry, historical novels and to a lesser extent in drama, creative writers in every Indian language have derived inspiration from the life of the Buddha, and from the wonderful blossoming forth of Indian culture under the impact of the Buddha's personality and ideas. The material on this theme is not only vast but it is also scattered in books and journals in more than than a dozen languages. In this paper, I will devote some attention to the Buddhist influence in three languages : English, Hindhi and Bengali.

When one thinks of the influence of Buddhism in modern Indian literature in English, the first name that comes to mind is that of Sir Edwin Arnold. Although he was English by birth, Arnold identified himself so closely with the life and culture of India that his famous poem, *The Light of Asia*, may justly be claimed by modern India as part of its own literary harvest of nineteenth century. Many outstanding leaders and thinkers of modern India have felt the influence of Edwin Arnold's poem. Mahatma Gandhi says in his autobiography that he knew very little about the Buddha and Buddhism until he read *The Light of Asia*. Jawaharlal Nehru often referred to it as one of his favourite books, to which he returned from time to time.

Arnold's book does not carry the Buddha-story to its conclusion. The sub-title says that the poem deals with the llife of the Buddha up to the time to his Great Renunciation. But actually several post-Renunciation episodes are included. The poem has many limitaions. The sequence of events is not always accurate. The language is archaic and strikes the modern reader as rather artificial. The descriptions are sometimes full of exaggerations. But there are certain unique features in this poem which compensate for the limitations. The poet tries to show us the deeper meaning of the Buddha legend. The historical Buddha, born as Siddhartha, is seen as only one of the several manifestations of the eternal Buddha-principle. At the same time, the intensely human side of the Master's personality is emphasized without eliminating the miraculous or supernatural element in the traditional account given in the *Lalitavistara*—the text on which Arnold has based his poem.

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In *The Light of Asia* Siddhartha is portrayed as a sensitive human being responding with all his heart to varied situations evoking joy, wonder and love, though compassion *(Karuna)* is the dominant *rasa*. He is deeply moved by the all-pervasive nature of suffering. But he emerges from the poem not as abnormally gloomy but as a complete, balanced person. To quote from arnold's Preface:"There is not a single act or word which mars the perfect unity and tenderness of this Indian teacher, who unites the truest princely qualities with the intellect of a sage and the passionate devotion of a martyr." The poet sees in the Buddha's teaching "the eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom". How refreshingly different is this estimate of the Buddha from that which prevailed even among many scholars, at the time when Arnold's poem was written.

In The Light of Asia the Buddha is placed decisively in his Indian milieu. He emerges as the continuator of a hoary tradition. Though repelled by some aspects of the prevalent system of values and attitudes, he appeals frequently to the perennial wisdom of his land, and sometimes even quotes the authority of Hindu scriptures. In his relationship with elders and teachers, Siddhartha adheres to the ancient virtues of humility and reverence. His behaviour is that of a refined, humane, well-bred Indian of the sixth century B.C.Moreover, the poet places his hero in a natural typical Indian setting. He gives us some fine descriptions of the Indian landscape and of the flora and fauna of rivers and lakes, groves and forests, seasons, birds and flowers, and above all the Himalayas that have shaped the mind and heart of India. Throughout *The Light of Asia* we notice Siddhartha's sensitiveness to the sights, sounds and scents of his Indian environment. There is uniterrupted harmony between human perfection and the rhythm and beauty of nature.

I will refer to only two Indian writters who have taken up Buddhist themes in their English wirtings. In Vimala Raina's novel, *Ambapal*, we see an interesting attempt to reconstruct the social and cultural conditions that prevailed in India at the time of the Buddha. The central theme is the Buddha's acceptance of an invitation by Ambapali, a beautiful countesan, much to the chagrin of the aristocrats of Vaishali who felt that the Buddha had slighted them. Many figures in the Buddha story come alive in this historical novel : Ananda and other disciples of the Buddha; King Ajatashatru of Magadha and his father, King Bimbisara; the Buddha's wicked cousin, Devadatta; and many others . Vimala Raina has woven, with commendable skill, the fundamental teachings of the Buddha in her novel.

Sarojini Naidu, one of the few Indian women who attained popularity entirely by their English writings, made frequent references to the

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Buddha's influence on her not only in her essays but even more effectively in her famous speeches which held the audience spellbound. Before she joined Mahatma Gandhi and plunged into the vortex of politics, Sarojini Devi was regarded as a very promising poetess. One of her poems, acclaimed by British critics and included in the *Oxford Book of Mystic Verse* is entiled to a Buddha Seated on a Lotus.* Here are a few lines from this fine tribute to the Buddha:

Lord Buddha, on thy Lotus Throne,
With praying eyes and hands elated,
What mystic rapture dost thou own
Immutable and ultimate?
What peace, unravished of our ken,
Annihilate from the world of men ? ...
With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain
With faith that sinks and feet that tire;
But nought shall conquer or control
The heavenward hunger of our soul.
The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite
How shall we reach the great unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus Throne ?

(iii)

The Buddhist influence can be seen quite clearly in Hindi fiction, and even more strikingly in Hindi poetry. The pioneers of historical fiction in Hindi selected their themes either from mythology or from ancient and medieval Indian historical figures. Hindi or Muslim. But in the second quarter of the twentieth century writers began to turn to Buddhist subjects for their novels and stories. Rahula Sankrityayana, whose work as a Buddhist scholar has been noticed in a preceding section, placed many of his stories in a Buddhist setting, as can be seen from his books *Simha Senapati, Jaya Yodheya* and *Volga Se Ganga* (from Volga to the Ganges). Taking their cue from Rahulji, many younger writers introduced Buddhist locale in their stories. Their interest, however, is mostly limited to the social, political and economic conditions of northern India in the age of the

*This is the last poem in the volume of Sarojini Naidu's poems published in 1905 under the title *The Golden Threshold*.

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Buddha. It is only in poetry that we witness the inner drama of the Buddha's life, and feel the presence of his wise, compassionate personality.

Many leading poets of Hindi have written poems about the Buddha. To mention only a few names, Mahadevi Verma, recognized as the greatest living Hindi poet, has paid her homage to the Buddha in many fine poems. She has also produced a very sensitive Hindi translation of Ashvaghosha's Sanskrit classic, *Buddha—charita.* One of the first among modern Hindi poets to write on Buddhist themes was Maithili Sharan Gupta. In his long poem, "*Yashodhara,*" there is a moving tribute to Prince Sidhartha's wife.Her courage and quiet dignity, her tender love for her husband and ultimate fulfilment through conversion to the Dharma:all these are brought out in Maithili Sharan's poem. Sumitra Nandan Pant, too,has written many poems about the Buddha. One of these, "Buddha Ke Prati" (To the Buddha) is perhaps the longest poem on the Buddha in modern Indian literature about two hundred and fifty lines. The poet lets his imagination travel back twenty-five centuries and pictures the circumstances in which the Buddha appeared, liberating the human mind from superstition and fear. He speculates as to what would have happend to India if the Tathagata had been present during the dark, conflict ridden ages in India's long history. Then, returning to the modern age, he appeals to the Buddha to return and bless the earth. "Come , O Serene, O Beautiful! The human mind greets you and requests you to bring a new golden age to the earth. May a new humanity feel your healing touch! May you transform poison into nectar and death into new life."

Turning to Bengali literature, I will only refer to some of Tagore's plays and poems. Tagore wrote two major plays on Buddhist themes. In"Chandālikā"(The Low-Caste Girl)we see Ananda—the Buddha's closest disciple— accepting water from the hands of Prakriti, a girl of the most despised caste. Reminded of her dignity as a human being for the first time, Prakriti falls in love with the holy man. When he spurns her advances she requests her mother,who is a sorceress,to cast a spell upon Ananda. The spell works, and Ananda is at her feet, begging for her love. Prakriti is shocked by the lustful expression in his eyes. Ashamed of the degradattion she had caused in one who was so pure and noble, she asks her mother to revoke the spell. The mother does so, but the strain kills her.*

"Natīr Pūjā" (The Dancing-girl's Worship) is the story of Shrimati, a professional dancer, who is a devotee of the Buddha. She is selected to offer worship at the altar where the Buddha had once preached . King Ajatshatru, hostile to Buddhism, has forbidden the worship, but the Buddhist Samgha continues to offer Worship on *vaishakhai purnima,* the

*The poet later re-wrote *Chandalika* as a ballet. Both the play and the ballet have been staged at Calcutta from time to time.

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Buddha's birthday. Princess Ratnavati , angry because a low born girl has been selected, orders Shrimati to perform a dance instead of offering worship. Ratnavati's purpose is to desecrate the altar. But Shrimati dances with deep religious devotion. She has offered to the Buddha her most precious possession—her skill as a dancer. And so the ceremony of worship has taken place. The king orders Shrimati to be executed. The Princess repents and begs forgiveness of the dancer who lies dead before the Buddha's altar+.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote poems on the Buddha in every phase of his literary career. But as he grew older his feeling of admiration for the Buddha became deeper. Some of his most famous poems on the Buddha and Buddhism were written during the last fifteen years of his life. In 1927 the poet travelled extensively in countries of South Asia. On 23 September that same year he visited the great Buddhist stupa at Borobudur in Java. There, in the shade of that mighty monument, he wrote a poem in which the idea is that the silent stones of Borobudur still proclaim a message which is heard above the noise, clamour and strife of modern life. Two weeks later he wrote a poem entitled *Siam* at Bangkok. In this poem he recalls how the Indian mind, inspired by the Buddha, expressed itself creatively in distant lands.

In the poem "Buddhadever Prati" (To Lord Buddha), written at the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath, Tagore bemoans the intellectual and spiritual stagnation in his land and prays to the Buddha to revitalize India once again. Two other prayers addressed to the Buddha have been introduced in the play, "Natīr Puja", to which a reference has already been made. Both have been set to music and are often sung by exponents of Rabindrasangeet. When published separately, one of the poems carried the title "Buddhajanmotsava" (Festival of Buddha's Birthday) and the other was called "Sakal-kalusha-tāmasa-hara" (Remove all Evil and Darkness). Both the poems are permeated with a spirit of gratitude and devotion to the Buddha.

Of all the poems that Tagore wrote on Buddhist themes, the most moving is about Vasavadatta, a beautiful courtesan. On a hot afternoon, sitting leisurely by the window of her cool, comfortable room, Vasavadatta sees a handsome Buddhist monk, Upagupta, resting by the roadside. She sends her maid to invite the young ascetic to her house. Upagupta, smiles and says, with utmost gentleness, that he would certainly visit Vasavadatta some day, at the right moment. A few months later Vasavadatta is stricken by a deadly pestilence. Her rich admirers desert her. The authorities fling her outside the city limits where she lies groan-

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+*Natir Puja* was first performed at Calcutta in January, 1927. Tagore himself appeared on the stage in the first performance.

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ing in a dilapidated hut. Her face is disfigured, her limbs have lost their strength. She is awaiting the death, alone and abandoned. Suddenly, she hears footsteps approaching the hut. "Who are you, O compassionate one?" she asks in a feeble voice. Upagupta comes in and says : "Tonight the right moment has arrived, Vasavadatta. I have come to visit you."*

V

A new age dawned upon India in August 1947, when this ancient land shook off the trammels of bondage and took her place in the community of nations with her self-respect restored. The struggle for India's independence was won under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. If we are asked to name the two greatest men that India has produced during her five thousand years of recorded history, the answer will be almost unanimous : Buddha and Gandhi. There is so much in Gandhi that reminds us of the Buddha. Having conquered fear, anger and craving, he dedicated his life to the amelioration of human misery. Having become an *arhat* he went on to become a *bodhisattva.* When a western journalist asked Mahatma Gandhi what his greatest ambition was, he answered : "To wipe the tears from human eyes." Many modern Indian poets have described Gandhi as the Buddha-principle remanifested on Indian soil twenty-five centuries after the Tathagata's death. The Mahatma's spinning wheel is reminiscent of the *Dharmachakra* (The Wheel of Righteousness) which the Buddha set in motion in his first sermon at Sarnath+.

In many of his speeches and short essays published in his journals— *Young India* and later *Harijan*— Mahatma Gandhi paid glowing tributes to the Buddha's "victory through truth", *dharmavijaya*. At Gandhiji's prayer-meetings, selections from Buddhist scriptures, particularly from the *Dhammapada*, were recited frequently. In the lives of Jesus and Buddha, the Mahatma saw in concrete form the power of gentleness, the power that is generated through identifying oneself with the suffering of others. In one of his articles Gandhiji wrote : "What was the larger symbiosis which the Buddha and Christ preached? It was gentleness and love. The Buddha fearlessly carried the struggle into the adversary's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem. Both were for intensely direct action. But even as Buddha and Christ chastised, they showed

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*The poem is entitled "Abhisara" (Assignation). It was published in a collection of poems entitled *Katha*. The theme was suggested by an episode mentioned in the Buddhist text *Bodhisattvavadana-kalpalata.*

+In this context I would like to refer to the poem Buddha Ane Gandhi" (Buddha and Gandhi) by the famous Gujarati poet, Umashankar Joshi.

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unmistakable love and gentleness in every act of theirs".+ These comments show that Gandhiji's admiration for the Buddha stemmed from two ideas: first, that truth must be *lived*, not just preached; and second, that "truth in action" (which is really the same thing as *karmayoga*) should not be something austere and forbidding, but should reveal a spirit of compassion.

With the death of Mahatma Gandhi in January 1948, the mantle of leadership fell on the shoulders of Jawaharlal Nehru. It is often wrongly imagined that Nehru was an agnostic interested only in the dynamics of social, political and ecnomic change. Actually there was a spiritual streak within time which was revealed unexpectedly in his talks and conversations. Of all the religions of India, he was most strongly attracted to Buddhism. He once said that he had never bent in worship before the image of any deity, but when he first stood before the sculptured face of the Buddha, absorbed in meditation, his hands were involuntarily folded in adoration.

In his books, *Glimpses of World History* and *Discovery of India*, Nehru shows a deep understanding of the important role of Buddhism in India's cultural evolution, and his admiration for the Buddha's personality and message. In 1949, the relics of the Buddha's disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, were brought from Sri Lanka and enshrined in a new stupa at Sanchi. Nehru participated in the ceremony and made a moving speech on the occasion. Seven years later the 2500th centenary of the Buddha's *Pari-nirvana* was commemorated on a large scale all over India. On Nehru's personal initiative, an attempt was made to gather on a single platform Buddhists from all parts of the world, belonging to different schools. No single event has roused as much interest and appreciation of Buddhism as these celebrations did. Radio broadcasts, thousands of articles and hundreds of books published on the occasion, bore testimony of India's love and reverence for the Buddha.

In the last phase of his life Nehru witnesses the unfortunate conflict between India and China. One of the factors which led to the strained relations between the countries was the welcome accorded to the Dalai Lama and his followers by the Government of India. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet, thousands of Tibetans, representing a unique and ancient religious and cultural tradition, journeyed through difficult mountain-terrain and crossed the border. India refused to turn her back upon them . The Dalai Lama was received with every mark of honour, and thousands of priceless manuscripts and art objects were saved . A new interest was kindled in the study of Tibetan Buddhism, about which many misconceptions had prevailed. Now many Indian universities have special

+From an article in *Young India* May 1920.

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courses in Tibetan Buddhism. An institute of Tibetan-Buddhist studies was established at Delhi shortly after the Dalai Lama's arrival. Recently , another institute of Buddhology with special emphasis on Tibetology has been started in Sikkim.

Buddhism has thus once again become a living force in India after the attainment of independence. The Mahabodhi Society, which was founded as early as 1891, has expanded its activities considerably and has opened new branches. Another phenomenon which should be mentioned here is the conversion of thousands of low caste Hindus to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. The event has not had any measurable cultural results and its overtone has been largely social, economic and to some extent, political. But the conversions certainly highlighted the fact that once again, after many centuries, thousands of people could regard Buddhism as a religion of equality, justice and tolerance a religion which could offer a humane, dignified alternative.

Before concluding this essay I would like to mention a few interesting facts which, taken cumulatively , indicate the extent and strength of the Buddhist element in Indian life. BuddhaJayanti is now a national holiday and is celebrated all over India. Every year, on the occasion of the Buddha's birthday, meetings are held in all major cities and tributes are paid to the Buddha. There are special radio broadcasts and dramatic features, and many newspapers publish articles on the Buddha and Buddhism. The wheel, one of the most important among Buddist symbols, has found a place on India's national flag, Above the President's chair in the Indian Parliament, the words "Dharmachakra pravartanaya" (For Revolving the wheel of Truth) are displayed prominently.

Names of places and persons associated with the Buddha or Buddhist history, have become popular . Place names like Nalanda, Ajanta, Lumbini, Vaishali and Shravasti are given to public and private buildings, and even to hotels . Boys are being given names like Siddhartha, Buddhadeva, Rahula, Ananda, Amitabha, Lokeshvara and most popular of all Ashoka. Three decades ago, one rarely heard feminine names like Yashodhara, Sanghamitra, Tara, Gotami, Ambapali, or Sujata. Now thousands of girls are being given these and other Buddhist names.

The revival of Buddhism in Indian life and culture has not been brought about through the whim of a dictator, or through a foreign invasion or through any ideological pressure. It has been spontaneous and many-sided. The Buddhist element in our heritage has asserted itself in the modern age through its own inherent vitality which, though obscured, had never really been lost.

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Tantrism and Womanhood

M. C. Joshi

Of Sanskrit origin, the term Tantra is derived from the verb *tan* meaning to expand and thus, it literally denotes anything which could be stretched or extended like the threads in a loom. In fact it is applicable to more than one phenomenon of knowledge or system of thought and action involving process and technique of expansion from one specific root. Commonly, however, the Tantra is in Indian context considered to be a part and parcel of Saktism i.e.the sect devoted to the worship of Supreme Energy,the Devi or the Mother-goddess,with its complex magico-religious rites and mysticism,despite the association of Tantrachara (Tantric ritualism) with Māhāyan Buddhism, especially Vajrayana and Jainism and some of the sects of Hinduism in varying degrees. Since Tāntrism is inseparable from Śāktism and it is only the sākta thought and philosophy which offers fullest explanation of the Tantrachara and associated elements, we have used the terms Tantra and Tāntrism in the present article in the context of Śāktism only.

Technically, the Tantras are defined to characterize a kind of knowledge that protects (the devotee) on its expansion *(Tananāt Trāyate iti Tantraḥ)* by emerging out of seed or *vindu* (dot) fron the void (sunya) i.e. invisible and incomprehensible Energy (Sakti), which further transforms itself (herself) into triple powers of *ichchha* (will), *jñāna* (knowledge and *kriya* (action) , the fundamentals of creations, invariably represented by a triangle (inverted in Sakta *yantras* (mystic diagrams). Her first perceptible form is believed to be sound often styled as Vāk (speech) or Sabha Brahman (word Eternal) . The Āgamas (non—vedic Tantric scriptures), which are mostly of medieval origin , further define the term Tantra as under:

Tanoti-vipulānarthān
Tatva-mantra smanvitān I
Trāṇañacha-kurute yasmāt
Tantramitya-vidhīyate II

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(Tantra is that knowledge which) on exposition (expansion) unveils various purposes and meanings of the essence (of rites) and *mantras* and protects a *sādhaka* (i.e. practitioner of Tantra) in diverse ways (from external and internal dangers).

The origin of Tāntrism is shrouded in obscurity in spite of the prevalence of the concept of female divinities in protohistoric cultures of India including the Harappan civilization.No doublt some elements of śākta Tāntrism are traceable in Vedas and associated literature especially in Devī-sūkta, Rātri sūkta and Śrī-Sūkta, but these do not furnish full details of Vedic Śaktism and rites or rituals. It appears that the Tantric system of the Śāktas (follower of the cult of Śakti) gradually developed through several centuries into a way of life and behaviour with a philosophy interwoven around the principle of monotheistic Female Energy i.e. the Goddess, in the process of the growth of post-Vedic Hinduism in India. On the basis of data found in *Devī-Mahātmya* section of the *Mārkandeya Purāna* and Gangadhar epigraph of A.D. 423-24 fron Rajasthan, it can be suggested that in India by about the fourth-fifth century A.D. the Tāntrism connected with Śākti cult had attained a cognizable form, although much of its available character pertains to religious and philosophical developments of the medieval period.

According to Tantric beliefs the Goddess, who is the Supreme Knowledge , the Sole Mother and the Sole Energy of the universe, manifests herself in diverse subtle and gross forms, represented in *mantras, maṇḍalas* or *yantras* and iconic concepts under different names. Her principal iconic forms comprise: Durga Mahishamardini (Goddess, the killer of the demon Mahishasura), the Matrikas like Brāhmī (fig. 1), Śaivī Vaishṇavī, Kaumarī, Indrāṇī, Chāmunda and Vārāhī (representing the energies of male deities like Brahma, Siva, Vishnu , etc.), and the ten Mahāvidyas (knowledge personified), viz., Kali, Tara, Shodasi, Tripura, Bhairavi Bhuvanesvari, Chhinanamasta, Dhumavati Bagala and Kamala or Lakshmi (fig. 2). These manifestation of the Supreme Goddess (Devi) can be classed into three groups on the basis of their appearance viz. serene *(sattvika),* glamourous *(rājasika)* and terrific *(tāmasika).* The concept behind these forms are intended to reveal the Devi's aspect connected with the promotion of knowledge *(vidyā)* and destruction of ignorance *(avidyā).A* devotee or *šadhaka* may select through a qualified teacher *(guru)* a particular form, as per his nature and choice for worship . Accordingly he is initiated in the Tantra *sādhana* and is given a specific *mantra* (mystic formula) to chant and is permitted to worship the specific *yantra* (mystic diagram) of that select female divinity. All the manifestation of the Goddess, even those of the fearful type like Chāmuṇḍa (fig. 3), Dhūmavati, Chhinnamasta or Mahakali are supposed to protect and guide the devotee *(sadhaka)* with unbound maternal compassion. Yet, the

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universal Mother is to be adored with a total feeling of surrender.

As the supreme form the Goddess is the *śūnya* or void, an initiated devotee gradually shifts his attention from gross to subtle form, i.e. from image to abstract, identifying , ultimately, himself with the imageless reality (void) either through creative *(sṛishṭi-krama)* or the destructive path *(saṁhāra-krama)* represented, respectively, by the Shodaśī and Kālī aspect of the mother eternal amongst the Mahāvidyās.

In the tantra system the *sādhana* consists of mainly *dhāyana* (meditation) with intense *bhakti* devotion, practice of *yoga* , secret recitation of the *mantra* (of the specific Devī or female divinity) comprising one Sanskritic letter or a syllable or group of syllables or words or a sentence or more and worship of the *maṇḍala* or *yantra* with specified materials.

Mantra and *yantra* go together for they are interrelated as both represent the deity (Śakti) and her symbolic abode . A Śākta *yantra*, which is generally carved on stone or metal or sometimes painted, consists of a *vindu* (dot), a trikoṇa or trikonas (triangles) a *vṛitta* or *vṛittas* (circles,with or without petals and *bhūpura* (square) with projections on all sides and is supposed to present , symbolically, the Universe *(Loka)* (fig. 4), presided over by a Mahāvidyā. We have already explained the significance of *vindu* and *trikona* in tāntrism, and multiplication of the triangle in a *yantra* suggests further process of the expansion of power in different directions (fig. 5). In Tantric terminology an inverted triangle is associated with the Goddess and the one with upward apex with Śiva . A six pointed star with double triangles thus represents *Kamakala* or communion of Śiva and Śakti . In those Śakta *yantras* where there is no upward triangle (as in Kali *yantra* Śiva element has to be treated as dead or non-existent (fig. 6). The circles in the *Yantras* indicate infinite creation, the petals creative glory and the square a kind of *prākāra* (enclosure) or the outer-limit of the divine abode and the four projections stand for four gateways to the interior . The *mantras* written on the *yantras* are stated to make them alive and highly effective on account of their sound value.

The followers of the Tantras are divided into two categories viz., those associated with puritanical right path *(Dakshiṇa mārga)* and the others following the left order or way *(Vāma - mārga).*

The left-siders or the Vāmamārgīs permit in their *sādhana* the actual use of meat, fish, wine, sex and poses and gestures, unlike the former who employ in their rituals substitutes of these items, if necessary, with the permission of their teachers.

The colours carry great symbolism in Tantrism and have special significance. For instance yellow colour is believed to represent earthliness, red represents desires, ambitions and glamour white represents purity and blue represents infinity. The iconography of the principal Śakta deities is

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also closely associated with colour symbolism and various stages of *sādhana.* Similarly the *āyudhas* or attributes held by major forms of the Devī are also important from the standpoint of symbolism connected with Sakta philosophy . It may not be possible to discuss all of them but a few examples can be referred to; weapons like sword, trident (triśūla) and celt *(kartṛi)* indicate means to destroy ignorance, severed head (munda) stands for destroyed ignorance *(avidyā), pāsā* (noose) represents attachment and attraction and rosary *(aksha-mālā)* and book respectively speech (Vāk) and knowledge *(Vidyā).*

Unfortunately, the Tantra system as a whole has been grossly misunderstood by the majority of traditional as well as modern scholars for one or the other reason. Amongst the Brāhmanist teachers and pandits of yore, Vaishṇava saints and non-Śākta authors of texts and commentaries, including the reformers of the last century, many have openly condemned it. A British scholar of the early nineteenth century therefore defined Hinduism itself as they 'most puerile, impure and bloody system of idolatory that was ever established on the earth'. He further wrote, perhaps keeping in view the prevalence of Tantrism among the Hindus, that they are amongst an idle, effeminate and dissolute people of disordered imagination who frequent their temples not for devotion but for satisfaction of their licentious appetites'. Even a distinguished orientalist like Prof. H. H. Wilson failed to understand the Tantras and considered their associated rituals as 'nonsensical extravagance'.

Several sections of the Indian population and outsiders till today identify the Tantras as a kind of black magic connected with dreaded and ghastly rituals performed in secrecy with free use of wine and woman.

The facts, however, are otherwise. Very few people could get the opportunity to understand the Tāntric religious thought and rituals because of the veil of secrecy covering them in accordance with the injunctions of Tantric texts themselves. One of the main reasons for the growth of misconceptions about the Tantras is their secretive character deliberately introduced by their own authors and teachers with a view to selecting only the most deserving and sincere persons as disciples and to maintain the purity of the order. The incorporation of elements of secrecy in the system was also considered necessary to avoid showmanship, fame and growth of any kind of pride causing deviation from the intended goal. Real Tāntric teachers, therefore, always avoid preaching the doctrines of their faith publicly, for they know that this is the most difficult and dangerous path and a very few are qualified to follow it.

Like Vedatism or Sāṅkhya philosophy , the Śākta Tantras also aim at achieving final liberation which according to the latter is represented in the merger of self into Absolute Reality (i.e. the Ultimate Motherhood) through the difficult process of raising the Serpent power (or Kuṇḍalini-

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Yoga) with a spirit of intense devotion and total surrender. The system is also connected with the complex concept of primordial sound, characterized by fifty letters of Sanskritic alphabet comprising vowels and consonants from a 3m the first letter to *ksha* 3m the last letter within and outside the human body in subtle and gross forms, chanting of *mantras* (mystic formulae) and worship of the diverse manifestations of the Supreme Mother in the form of *yantras* or otherwise.

The fundamental difference between Śākta-Tantrism and other philosophies is that this system believes in the attainment of liberation without a negation of material pleasures *(bhoga)* for it regards the world itself as a reflection *(ābhāsa)* of the Absolute Reality (the Goddess) , Siva , her counterpart in the creation, derives his sole energy from her and so also other deities. In the process of destruction , these energies are withdrawn by the Supreme Energy.

Further, the Tantra-chara or the Tantric practices, according to strict Sastric injunctions, are to be learnt from only a qualified guru or teacher after initial initiation. It may not be out of context to mention here that the *guru's* position is Supreme in Tantrism and his dictates are final in all maters (fig. -6). Besides, he is believed to symbolize in himself the *mantra* as well as the deity, and to serve as an eternal source of bliss for the disciples, and there could be nothing beyond him.

A notable feature of Tantric esoterism is the large-scale use of secret expressions, symbols and motifs which can be understood only under the guidance of qualified teachers of the subject. Therefore, the followers of Tantras do not take cognizance of any devotees of the Goddess who is not properly initiated. The uninitiated people are called by Tantrics as *paśu* or animal i. e. being bound by fetters of ignorance.

Of an initiated Śākta, whether an ascetic or householder, the whole life, including behaviour and approach towards the temporal and spiritual world, is governed by strict ethical and religious discipline, rules and regulations till he achieves the highest stage of bliss (i.e. *Sarvatanta Svantra* or free of all the mystic-codes).

Amongst various facets of Sakta-Tantrism, the most appealing is its noble approach towards womanhood both in theory and practice. The Tantras not only adore the woman community for their excellent virtues but regard every aspect of womanhood as a representation of Supreme Feminine Energy or the Mother Eternal. Motherhood, according to traditional devotees of Śakti (Devī), whether in the terrific form of Kali, Chamunda, Dhumavati, etc., or with the benign expression of Tripurā, Mātaṅgī, Lakshmī, Sarasvatī, etc. is nothing but a perennial source of bliss and compassion nurturing, protecting and educating every child (creature); and so is every female. It is perhaps, therefore, the Devī Mahātmya or Durgā Saptsati dateable to circa 4th or 5th century, equates womanhood

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with knowledge and the Gooddess, as can be seen in the following verse:

Vidyā samastāstava Devi bhedāḥ
Striyaḥ samastāḥ sakala jagatsu
[Devi Mahatmya - XI. 5]

(O Goddess, all aspects of the knowledge and the women folk as a whole are only your manifestations in the world).

What is more interesting in this context is that the Tantric devotees of the Goddess attach much more importance to a lady-teacher *(strī-guru)* than a male one as testified by the following verse of *Gupta-Sādhana Tantra* (Bombay-1939):-

Bahu-janmārjjitāt-puṇyād-bahu-bhāgya-vaśādyadi
Strī-gurulabhyate.....

(Gupta-Sadhana Tantra, II, 17)

(Only a person who is greatly favoured by luck on account of his accumulated merits of several [previous] births, finds an opportunity to be initiated by the strī-guru or female teacher).

In almost all the significant Tantric rituals of the Śāktas, association and participation of women in superior capacity is essential. Their wishes even in the matters of rituals, ceremonies and rites are always to be obeyed as the direction of the Divinity herself. The female followers of Tantrism are not required to observe all the rules and regulations of the order although their observance is compulsory for men. Even the corpse of any ordinary woman has to be respected in the same way as the dead body of any initiated devotee of the Goddess. According to the belief of the Śāktas, all female forms of life being the representations of the Supreme Female are to be treated respectfully and it is on this account that the Tantras have strictly banned the offering of cow, she-goat, she-buffalo, doe, hen or any other feminine form amongst animals, birds or aquatic creatures, as sacrifice.

The following verse from *Meru Tantra*, a medieval text (quoted in *Puraśchayārnava*, III, Varanasi V.S.1961, p. 859) prescribes that no woman should ever be scolded or even hit with a flower despite her hundreds of crimes, for her defects are always to be ignored and virtues eulogized:

Striyaṁ śatāparādhān va pushpenādpi na tādayet
Doshān na gaṇayet Strīṇāṁ guṇāneva prakaśayet II

The Kulāchāra (Váma-mārga) or system of secretive (Tantric) worship of the Goddess with five M's. viz., *madya* (wine), *māṁsá* (animal flesh) *mīna* (fish) *maithuna* (union of male and female) and *mudrā* (ges-

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tures), which have often been condemned by modernists as a primitive form of *ritual*, prohibits even thinking in degrogatory terms about women, e.g.,

Varaṁ pūjā na kurvīta varam bali parityajet' I
Kulāchāra kuladravya kulapanktivaram tyajet' I
Tathāpinaiva yoshāṇām nindāyāṁ mānase charet II

(Better it is to stop performing worship (of the goddess) and offering of *bali* or food (to deities) or even to discard the Tāntric way of life, the use of sacred substances and the association of the Tantrikas or Kaulas than to indulge in the condemnation of the ladies even mentally).

It has to be remembered here that for a follower of Tantra, strict adherence to specified rules and rituals is obligatory but the above cited verse grants certain exceptional exemptions to Saktas only to stress the importance of respectful behaviour towards women whom the Goddess herself styles as her own image, on earth according to Sakti Sangama Tantra, pt. II, XXXVI, 35(*cf.: Surupa* va virupa va vanita mama vigraha).

Perhaps for such reasons alone the Tantric texts repeatedly emphasize the need of honouring and worshipping ladies without which there cannot be any kind of spiritual and earthly gains in the sakta families.

The *Mahachina Krama* of the Tantras further clarifies the position by stating that females always deserve to be specially worshipped and no hostility should be ever shown towards them *(Strī-deveśha naiva kartavyo visheshāt pūjanaṁ striyah.....II).*

Tantras make it compulsory for all their followers to pay respects to women of all classes and categories as can be observed in the verse:

Bālā va Yauvanomattā Vriddhā Vā sundarī tathā I
Kutsitā vā mahādushṭā namaskṛitya vibhāvayet II
Śakti-Saṅgam Tantra, pt. II.XXXVI. 39.

(One [a devotee of the Mother] should always salute [bow with respect] to all classes of women whether a girl, a youthful damsel, an aged lady, and an ugly or wicked female).

Clarifying the position in specific terms, the *Śakti-Saṅgam Tantras* further says that woman is only for adoration and not for enjoyment *(Nari sampujayet nityamu pabhoga na karyet).* The same text then goes to the extent of mentioning that a devotee must worship the ladies of all the age groups physically or mentally at their very sight, according to the situation, for accomplishing the *mantra-siddhi* (achieving the desired objective by chanting a *mantra)* and general well-being:

Sarvāvasthā tu devesī yoshidvandyā tu sadhakaiḥ I
Samastā mantra-siddhīnāṁ sarvasvarūpā Maṅgalā I
Sākshād-vā-manasāvāpī nārī pūjyaiva darśanāt II
Śakti-Saṅgama Tantra, pt.II,XXXVI,40-42

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According to the *Śakti-Saṅgam Tantra*, women of different types and features in their diverse moods and conditions only manifest various forms of the Goddess like Kālī, Mahishmardinī, Ugra-Tārā, Aśvārūḍhā, Durgā, Dhūmāvati, Brāhmī, etc. Tantric Sadhakas, therefore, do nothing against the wishes of the ladies or girls even amidst the most secret and significant mystic rituals, for their displeasure is believed to express the displeasure of the Goddess herself.

The most popular Tantric (Śākta) rituals comprise *Kumārī-pūjā* and *Suvāsinī-pūjā* (ceremonial propitiation of virgins and married women) which are commonly performed during the period of Nava-rātri or festival of nine nights especially in Autumnal months besides on other occasions. For such *pujas*, unlike the Brahmanical system, no caste or class distinctions are to be observed at all as is seen in the following verses of a Tantric text:

Pañchāchārena Deveśī Kulaśaktiṁ prapūjayet
Naṭī Kāpalikī, veśyā rajakī nāpitāṅganā ll
Brāhmanī, śūdrakanyācha tathā gopāla-kanyakā
Mālākārasyā-kanya cha nava-kanyā prakīrtitāh ll
Gupta-Sādhana Tantra I, 11-12

(The Kula-Sakti feminine energy) should [at least] be worshipped with five ritualistic articles, out of nine prescribed categories of girls [belonging to different classes of society] viz., female-dancer or actress, female ascetic of Kāpālika order, harlot, washer-woman female of the barber community and girls coming from Brahman, Sudra, shepherd and gardeners' families).

Performance of such rituals, according to the above mentioned Tantra, is positively to result in the accomplishment of all desires. The significance of Kumāri-Pūja (worship of a virgin) can be understood to a certain extent from the following hymns recited in the course of the ritual in accordance to the Tāntric tradition:

Mántrāksharamayīṁ Devīṁ mātrīnāmrūpa dhārinīm ll
Navadurgātmikām sākshāt-kanyāmāvāha-yamyaham ll
Jagatpujye jagadvandye sarvaśakti svarūpinī l
Pujāgrahāna Kaumārī Jaganmatarnamostute ll
Śākta Pramod, Bombay, V.S.1957, p. 402.

(O Devi, although, your body consists of the syllabus of the *mantras* [i.e. mystic sound] manifested in the Divine Mothers, I invite you in form of a Kanyā (girl) representing the Nine-Durgas [goddesses]. O, Virgin accept my *pūjā*, for you are the symbol of Sole Energy worshipped and respected universally).

It is, however, a matter of research as to how and when this came into vogue, for the Brahmanical Hinduism, which served as the basic source of Tantric thought and practices was essentially a faith dominated

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by masculine element. Besides, the Tantrāchāra (applied Tantrism) being practical in character necessitates every initiated follower of the sect to practise these difficult, although great ideals. All real Tantrikas who are hardly known outside their fold adhere to all the rules and regulations relating to the treatment of ladies of all classes. Under no circumstances are they supposed to humiliate a woman even at the cost of their life. According to their firm convictions a female can never be cruel and if by any chance in worldly life their suffering is caused by any lady it has to be borne patiently, as, in their view, every female is a representative of the Supreme Mother, who has nothing but compassion for her children.

In this connection, we are tempted to quote again from *Śakti-Saṅgama Tantra*, a great compilation of the 17th century, incorporating ancient and medieval traditions of Tantrism to show the unparalled reverence paid to womenfolk in the following terms:

Nārī Trailokyajananī nārī Trailokyarūpiṇī
Nārī tribhuvanādhārā nārīdeha svarūpinī
Puṁrūmpaṁ cha striyo-rūpaṁ yatkinchidrupamuttamam
Nārīchakre sarvarūpam yatkiñchijjagatīgatam
Na cha nārīsama saukhyaṁ na cha nārīsamā gatiḥ
Na nārī sadṛisam, rājyam na nārī sadrisaṁ tapah
Na nārī sadṛisam tīrthaṁ na bhūtaṁ na bhavisyati
Na nārī sadṛisoyoga na nārī sadṛisojapaḥ
Na nārī sadṛisam mantram na nari sadrisotapah
Na nari sadrisam vittam
Na bhutam na bhavisyati.
Sak-San, Tantra II,XIII, 43-48

(Symbolizing in herself the universe, the woman is the Universal Mother. She serves as the very base of the Universe and represents all the living forms whether feminine or masculine in this world. Neither any joy, nor position nor luck ,either in the past or in the future, could be equated with the state of being a woman, for neither happiness of owning a kingdom nor the pleasure of severe penance could be compared with her association.

Nothing had been achieved and nothing would be achieved in a centre of pilgrimage, in practising Yoga, secret chants, hymns or secret formulae or in penance without a woman and no amount of wealth or riches are comparable to her).

The verses quoted above preserve in them noblest tributes ever paid to the womanhood. No religion and philosophy of the world could develop such an ideal approach towards woman as available in the Tantras. Even modern advocates of feminism could not cherish such an ideal, although for the real followers of the Śakta Tantras it is mandatory.

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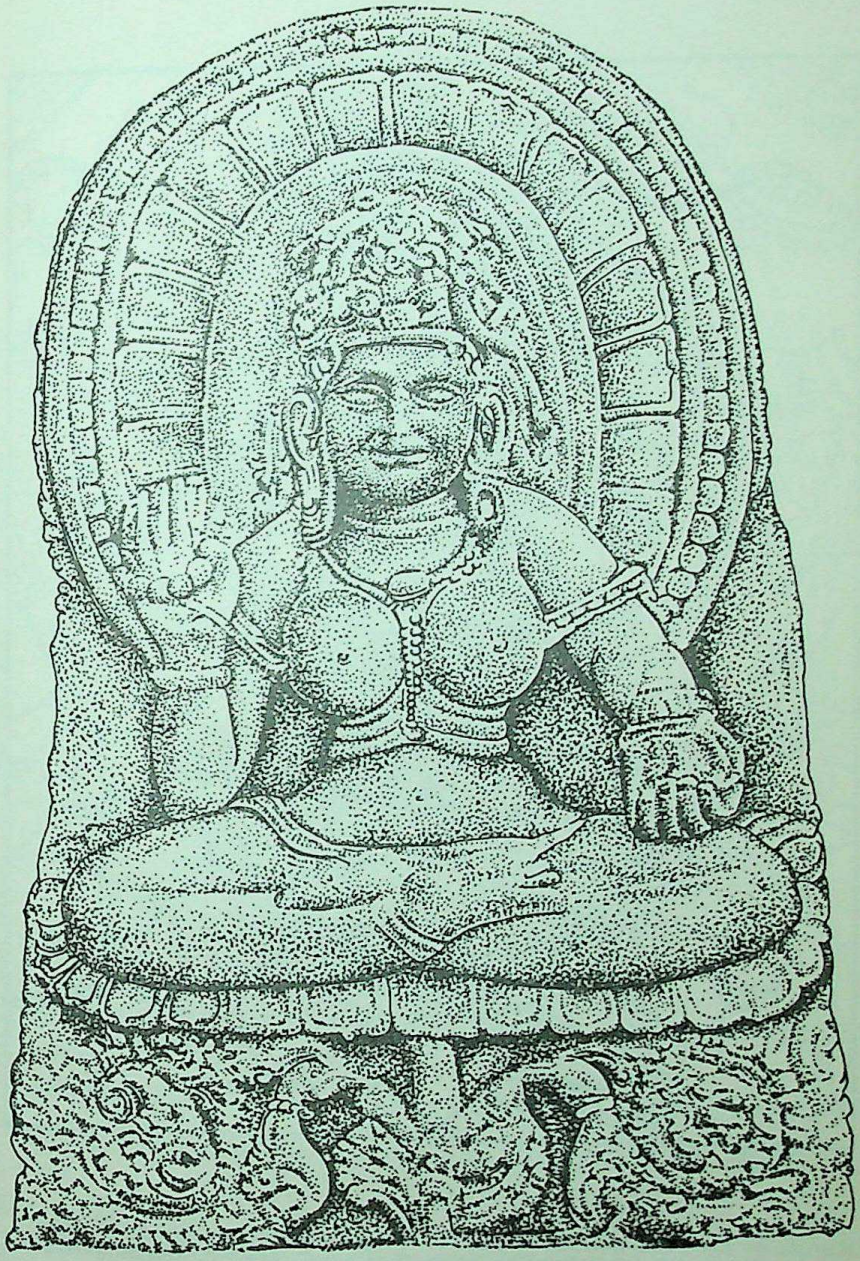

Fig. 1

Brahmi, one of the Matrikas, showing placid form of the Goddess(after a medieval sculpture at Jageshwar Dist. Almora, U.P.).

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Fig. 2

Kamala or Lakshmi, one of the ten Mahavidyas holding lotus flowers in upper two hands and offering protection (*abhaya*) with upturned right palm and boon (*vara*) with left palm placed downwards (to her devotee).

(After a traditional south Indain painting)

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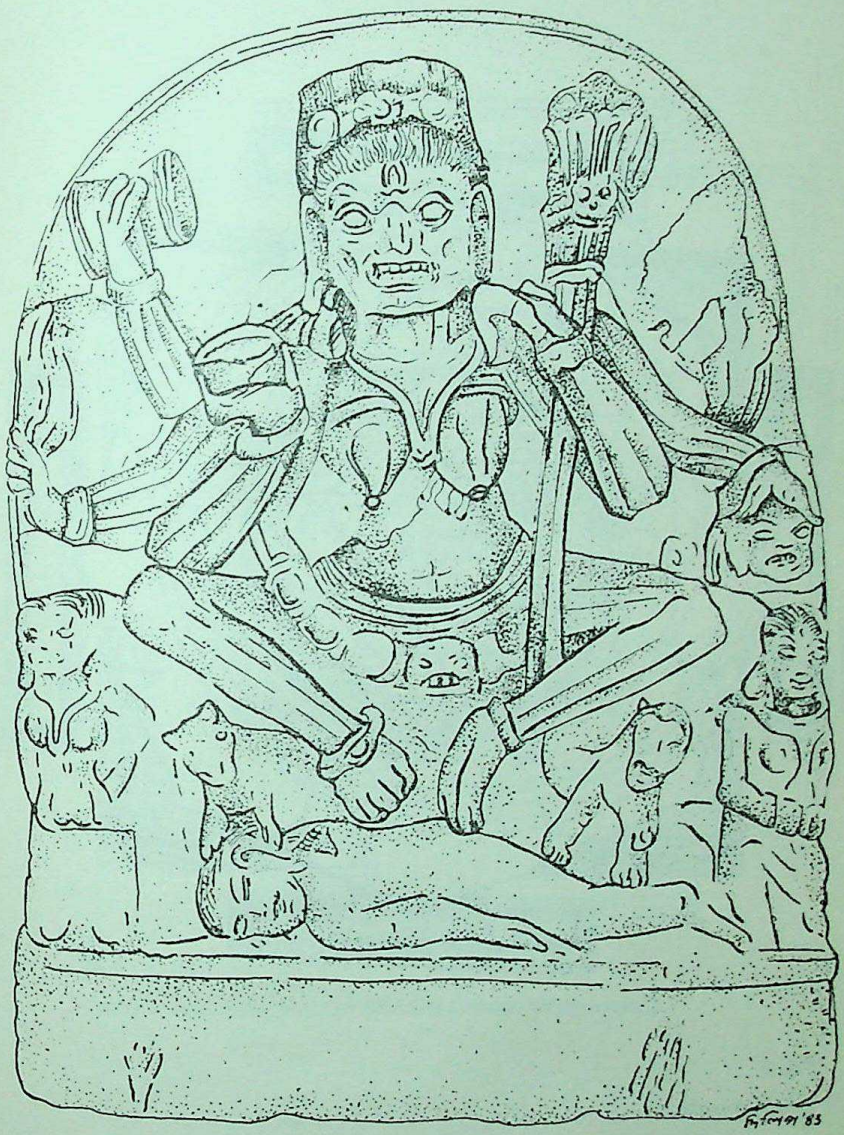

Fig. 3

Chamunda, a fierce form of the Goddess (after a medieval image from Baijnath, Dist. Almora, U.P.).

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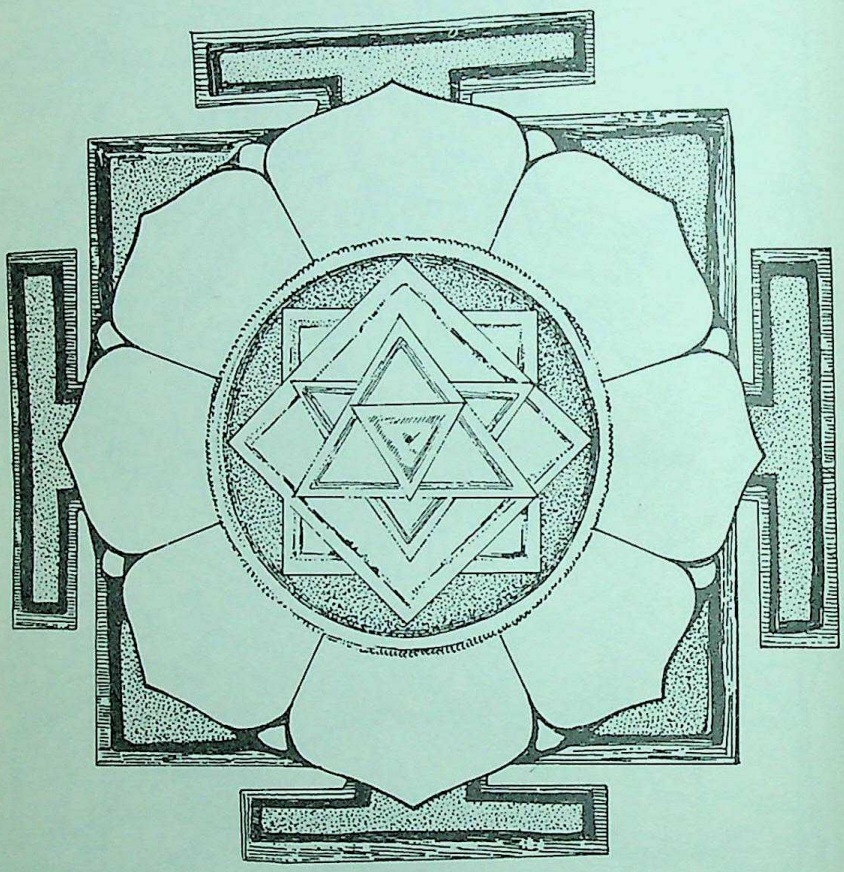

Fig. 4

Bagata-Yantra

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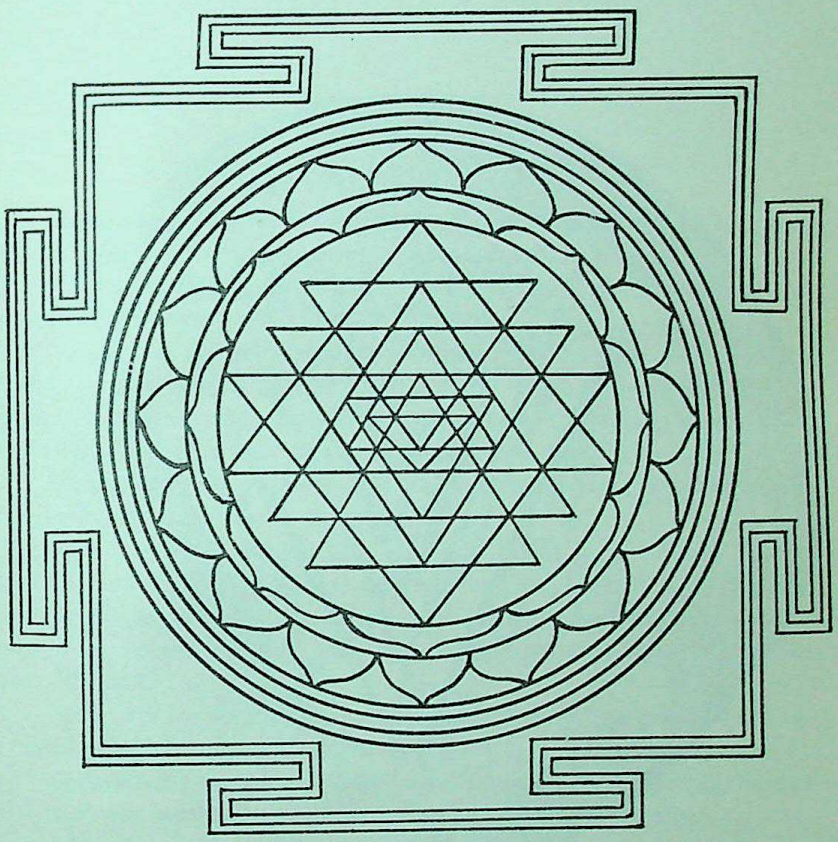

Fig. 5

Sriyantra, associated with the Goddess Shodasi (Mahavidya).

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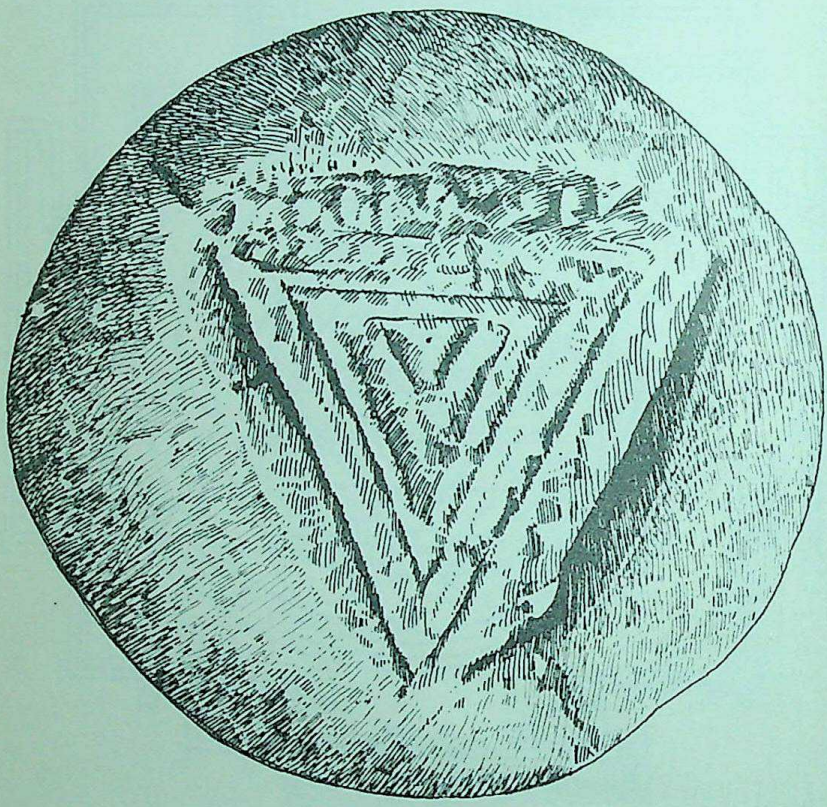

Fig. 6

Impression of a *Yantra*-seal(after the original seal found in excavations at Vikramsila, Bhagalpur, Bihar). of ten Pala period(a precursor of developed *Yantra* of the Goddess Kali.

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The Shelter

Gopinath Mohanty

I

Sadasiva, a government official recently transferred to the capital, alighted from a train from the south with his family and luggage.

'Father,' his daughter Mandakranta asked, as they came out of the station. 'Our house'?

'Our home, our home'! Sardula-Bikridita, younger than Mandakranta by two years, frisked around, shouting in joy. Little Anustup and Gayatri guessed, here was some occasion for celebration. 'Our home, our home, ' they chanted, linking their arms around each other's neck.

Walking behind them all, their mother, Damayanti, wondered aloud: 'Is the pitcher left behind in the train?'

'No, ' replied Sadasiva. 'It's with me. Come along.' Turning to his children, he added strenly, 'Hey, don't you make a racket.'

People gaped and tittered. No wonder; Sadasiva had an enormous amount of luggage. 'Coach, sir?' the eager coachmen swarmed around them. 'Coach?'

Mandakranta could not restrain herself. 'Father,' she asked, 'How far is home from this place?'

Sadasiva did not reply. Piling in the luggage into a coach, he herded his brood into another and commenced his journey into the city.

'How do you feel?' he enquired, looking at his heavily pregnant wife.

'All right,' she murmured.

'Hey!' Sadasiva admonished the children. 'Don't press against Mother.'

'O-u-r h-o-m-e!' Sardula-Bikridita started a lusty slogan. The rest immediately lifted their vioces in a shrill chorus: 'Our home, our home...'

The husband and wife looked at each other. Damayanti smiled. Sadasiva hung his head down.

Sadasiva was coming back to Cuttack after twelve long years. Not

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that he had never been here during all these years; in fact, he did visit the city once or twice almost every year on some work or the other.But this was the first time he was coming here on a transfer. With the family, with bag and baggage.

He sighed and looked out. Good old Cuttack — the city of his childhood and youth. He thought of his dear little village, eight miles from the city, on the other side of the river. Now chillies and brinjals must be growing on the deserted homestead, he sighed, the brinjals particularly well. Pumpkin creepers must be crawling all over the place. The vivacious pumpkin leaves — so round, dark green and bristly.

2

Buildings, buildings, buildings! buildings everywhere, some standing, some rising. Stacks of bricks, heaps of sand. Loaded trucks, groaning under the weight of bricks and sand and iron. Oh God, somebody's run over, the poor fellow...Well, very sad, true, but what can be done? wouldn't he have died some day? Come on, surely the wheel of progress can't be brought to a halt because of this little mishap! The inspired city — fine! The progressive city — Fine! The infinite variety of people — well, well! Sadasiva sighed.

He had been shoved out of here twelve years ago. What a sprawling state this Orissa, he snorted, and what large districts! What remote corners and holes to be shoved into! Mandakranta was born in Balasore, Sardula-Bikridita in Koraput, Anustup in Boda-Sambhar and Gayatri in Rosulkunda, the land of the great Bhanjas. But what about this one that hopes to see the light of the day at Cuttack, this little life that has been conceived in the jungles of Mankadanacha? Where's the shelter for him?

'This place is for the rich,' he blurted out. 'We don't belong here.'

'Let's see ', said Damayanti.

'You know, ' he said, 'the problem is that those who ought to pop off and be done with at a particular point of time, don't.'

'Why be so upset?' Damayanti consoled. 'Surely we'll find a shelter somewhere.'

'Surely? A far vision!' His scorching glance and hoarse, impotent sighs fell on the dusty road.

From behind came the cars and trucks, honking their horns.

3

They headed for Ratnakar's house. Ratnakar, an old friend, had started a small hardware business after the war. His house, a poor affair with a thatched roof, had one living room and a narrow passage. In the living

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room cots had been placed one after the other without gaps, with old tin trunks shoved underneath. Things hung from the ceiling in jute slings. Ratnakar's family included his wife and five school-going children, a couple of servants, a dog, a cat, the mice and cattle besides. Still he had offered to put Sadasiva at his place. 'Come and stay with us for as long as you wish--a month or a fortnight,' he had written to Sadasiva. Ratnakar of all people! Sadasiva smiled.

Surprises never cease. How many times have I not been on the brink of insolvency and doom? Yet I've always scraped through; something happened at the last moment, and I survived. Would life be worth living without its surprises, accidents and unforeseen elements? Oh, how they co-exist--unexpected charity and unexpected cruelty!

The tiny, tumble-down shed adjoining Ratnakar's house yawned, as if waiting for Sadasiva.

'Here's the place!' whispered Sadasiva to his wife, hoarsely.

Mud walls, a thin thatch roof, no windows, a door made of bamboo trellis. Inside, assorted hardware stuff, wooden boxes, pieces of junk, three almirahs of children's books and notes, two tables, five chairs, and two cots placed each to each. A toe-hold of space mercifully left unoccupied on either side of the joined cots.

4

Darkness. Torrential downpour. Snores.

Sadasiva woke up with a start, he didn't know why. He looked out. Why doesn't this life end? he wondered. Why doesn't it simply fold up? How does it stand all these strains-- this darkness, this rain and cold, this utter hopelessness? Really, how it survives with a little help now and then! But what's after this? Where, after Ratnakar's house?

A mouse ran over his hand, he started. The house swarmed with mice, he had seen them scurrying about in broad daylight. He strained his ears deep into the night. The stillness was eloquent.

A strange intermittent sound, accompanied by a stink, seemed to emanate from under his cot. Fishing out the flashlight from under the pillow, he shone it. A mangy, old dog without a strand of fur on its body lay curled up beneath the cot.

Why, of course! Sadasiva reflected, not without a little sympathy. A dog, too, can have its claim! But the slight itch of sympathy stopped, and Sadasiva sprang up to chase the dog out.

The dog seemed determined to resist being hustled out into the rain and darkness. A game of hide-and-seek, facilitated by the cots and tables and almirahs and luggage dumps, ensued. The dog responded with great enthusiasm.

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Half–an–hour later Sadasiva gave up. He flung himself on the bed and buried his face. The dog crawled under the cot and curled up. The scratching died down, but the stink remained.

Bracing to reconcile himself with the new situations of life, Sadasiva listened to the patter of rain and limped back to sleep.

He got up with a violent start in the morning, wondering if the world had taken him for Kumbhakarna. The din was ear-splitting. But of course it was only the city welcoming him on his first morning in its city-language: pounding of metal on metal.

He lifted his head just in time to shudder at the sight of a flock of sheep and a pair of bullocks barging into the room. He sprang to his feet.

5

Sadasiva braced himself to hunt for a house. Armed with a paan case, a bundle of bidi and a matchbox, he set out on a bicycle. A whole Sunday was before him. This country's a place for individual endeavour, he reminded himself. It's full of opportunities for the individual to explore the dimensions of his personality. He made a mental division of the city into four equal parts to be covered in four days, one day apiece.

He spoke to the paan-wallahs and brokers, colleagues and friends. He collected plenty of data, tracked down many houses, made many new acquaintances. Everytime he got some information, he promptly jotted it down in his diary and made a dash for the place.

No house.

'But this is vacant!'

'Someone has already taken it.. . . . . .

'What about the one that's coming up? Can I have that?'

'Sorry, someone has paid an advance with which the bricks were bought for laying the foundation.. . . . . .

No house.

He picked up a great deal of knowledge about the topography of the city. What a city -- what streets, what lanes, what alleys, and how vast!

The city had come of age. It had expanded when he, Sadasiva, wandered from jungle to jungle on his job. Houses had been built and roads had been laid. During the war years Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, had travelled from hand to hand, leaving a lengthening trail of the rich in the city. There was no longer a place for him here.

Whichever way he looked at it, Sadasiva found the city a great puzzle. All the familiar spots and landmarks had vanished; the place had become unrecognizable. Where a blue pond with swimming ducks had been, only a grim double-storied building stood. What was once a swamp with wild plants and flowers had become a concrete jungle. Houses were

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coming up even in waist-deep water, the constructions did not stop. Sadasiva felt they were clapping and mocking:'We've grabbed everything,there's no room for people like you here. Go back.'

And yet, not long ago, I had lived in this city! Sadasiva sighed. A walk down that road brought back a rush of memories. Why, isn't this that old neem tree? And this that row of houses? So there's been a little facelift here, huh? Good God, a homeopathic clinic has been opened here! Sadasiva reached the house in quick strides.

'Are you looking for someone?' a man enquired from inside.

'Well -er- no. Just passing by.'

It was no longer his house; it was a house of the past.

In another lane there the other house where he had lived for four years at another point of time. Peeping through its door, Sadasiva recalled what it had once been like. Fragments of his youth came sailing into his mind: the study, the girl next door, the moonlit nights and the girl's melodious voice trembling over the harmonium. He lingered near the door. Now there'll be a big commotion, he dreamt. Old Bhalu will perform a canine waltz in my honour. The poor dear loves sweets.

'Who are you looking for here?' barked someone from inside. Sadasiva started.

'Does Sadasiva live here?' he stammered.

'No.' A hulk waddled out of the house. 'Go ahead and look elsewhere.'

Sadasiva hung his head down and walked away. Who did I say I was looking for -- Sadasiva? Why, am I off my head or what? But what did the hulk say -- go ahead and look elsewhere? Go ahead, indeed! If I have to look for myself anywhere, it must be in the ruins of the past.

He managed to swerve out of the road in the nick of time, and the car whizzed past, spraying him with muddy water. His clothes were gone. He turned and saw a well-filled out man in fine white clothes in the car. Did he see what happened to me? Sadasiva wondered. Perhaps not. Maybe he was too preoccupied with his own problems. He owns the car all right, but is still a slave of the car, and I, a poor pedestrian, its victim, we don't know each other, we never can.

The dirty water seeped through his clothes and touched his skin. His reverie stopped. Why have regrets, he thought. Haven't I lived in many parts of the world? Haven't hearths been lighted for me in remote lands? Haven't I rested at godforsaken places to wipe my brow? Life has been shaped by such varied environments. And now all those places are gone. Several times I've been crushed, sometimes so mercilessly, but haven't I risen out of the ashes and bloomed forth in new soils? Many a time have I died, many a time have I been brought back to life. So why have regrets now?

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Roaming around the city the whole day, Sadasiva returned in the evening. The sky had become dark with ominous clouds, and he had not found a house.

6

After combing the city threadbare for four days, Sadasiva joined his new office. The joining was merely on paper; there was no place for him to sit. The office looked like an old beehive and the officials, bees. The bees flying in and out. Some a little big, some a little fat, some pretty small, and some awfully thin. Some droning loudly, some stinging sharply; the innumerable small ones producing a sad, muffled conversation.

With great difficulty Sadasiva managed to acquire a little patch of the corridor, a table, a chair and two benches. He sat down in relief, straightened his back, stretched out his hands on the table, and stared out. This is my domain, he smiled.

He looked at the floor and blinked. Goat turds and cow dung lay all over. Well, well, he sighed. Goat odour is supposed to be antitubercular and cow dung a disinfectant!

A nanny goat with three kids came ambling along. They stopped and regarded Sadasiva with surprise. Sadasiva watched them. So I'm not the sole master of this tiny domain of mine! He broke into a smile.

7

Sadasiva applied for official accommodation.That's none of our lookout, the boss noted. So he had to again fall back upon his own resources and endeavours. Pep-talks poured in: personal endeavour is the best thing, you know, self-help is the best help; look at how big companies are floated, big business run and big houses built by individuals; what is impossible, nothing!-- if you achieve nothing, you are either bone lazy or plain unlucky.

He spoke to many people, made frantic requests, and got assurances. Everyone seemed to drip with sympathy. Paan-drenched smiles and politeness all the way: 'Don't you worry at all. Ridiculous, why can't a house be found for you right away! All right, I'll keep it in mind.'

He went over the same groove the next day and the day after the next -- so over the days.

'Did you find anything for me?'

'Find what?'

'Why, a house! You said you'd look out.'

'Did I? Yes, I'm on the lookout. I'll let you know as soon as I spot one.

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Assurances all the way, but not a house.

Ratnakar smiled, he never grumbled. Days passed. Every evening Damayanti enquired about the house. The baby in her womb clamoured for a shelter outside.

Finally, it was she, Damayanti, who saved the day for Sadasiva. She applied to the hospital for a delivery cabin and got a one-room house in the hospital compound. Sadasiva moved in there with his brood.

'Our home!' Sardula-Bikridita cried, hopping all over the little patch of grass in front of the house. 'Ho-ho-ho! Our home!' Anustup, Mandakranta and Gayatri joined him. Damayanti beamed from the verandah. Watching the clouds gather in the sky, Sadasiva wondered what would he call the child to be born.

The door of the opposite house swung open and a funeral procession came out. Sadasiva started. 'Hey!' he spluttered. ‚Children, come into the house. Quick!'

Translated from Oriya by
Leelawati Mohapatra and *K.K. Mohapatra*

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Brahma - Vriksha

Prabanchan

We occupied our newly built house. Surprisingly enough there was a patch of vacant space in front of the house. It looked as though a four cubit cloth was spread there. We discussed how to use it. In accordance with the custom of giving respect to the elders in the house, first we asked granny about it.

She said that we could purchase a cow, tie it there and rear it - the traditional view. That would give grace to the house. The arrival of a cow was something like the arrival of Lakshmi Herself. The cow would yield milk. From the milk we could get buttermilk, curd, butter, ghee and other sundries. Those days every house had a cow. Now people have changed a lot.

Granny's suggestion was turned down by mother. She said, "All my life I have slaved for this family and become a shard and have lost all the strength I had. As if that was not enough should I now collect cow dung too?" From the day she came to this house as a young bride she had been noticing things. Her sisters-in-law gave her a hell of a time. She had to get up at four o'clock in the morning and she was allowed to go to bed only at two o'clock the next morning. She did not get a husband as any other woman would ordinarily have got. She was not given silk saris on auspicious days. When all sorts of people were adorning themselves with diamonds she was not able to wear even gold ornaments. On occasions of marriage she felt ashamed. She mused thus and finally came back to the world of reality. She said, "We can have a vegetable garden, plant lady's finger, brinjal, tomato and such others. Would be useful for making curry. We could even plant coriander."

My younger sister Soundara vehemently opposed this suggestion. She was a student of Home Science in a college. A friend of hers had jasmine, kanakambaram and rose in her garden. If these flowering plants were cultivated she could gather these flowers and adorn her hair with them. That would be a pleasant sight. Flowers were wonderful things. One

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should know how to enjoy beauty. Brinjal, lady's finger and all of their kind were useful only for eating. Man did not live on food alone. Soundara lived on dreams.

Without coming to any decision the assembly dispersed. All of us had many things to think over and do.

It was evening. Two days later father called us and told us that we could plant a murungai branch in the vacant space. Among trees murungai was the best. It would not snake its roots all over and pull down the compound wall or the very foundation of the house. It would not fill up the entire space. Among the greens the murungai leaves were the most excellent in quality. A very good expectorant. The leaves contain calcium. No need to speak about the fruit. Could prepare sambhar with them. The aromatic savour would draw the entire village. Could make tamarind sauce too. Also curry with coconut gratings. The tree would add beauty to the front portion of the house and provide a foliage of shade. The heat of the sun would not come anywhere near the room by the roadside. The room would always be cool. Father likes murungai. I too. There is no liking or disliking for mother.

Next morning the son of a friend of father, brought a murungai branch. He woke up father and gave it to him. By that time we were already up and taking coffee. That was a Friday.

Mother had taken her bath and tied a towel at the end of her hair to drain the water. In the turmeric glow of her face there was a faint smile. And she looked all the more charming.

Coffee was served to the boy who brought the murungai branch. Father went to take his bath. Usually he would take 30 or even 45 minutes to finish his bath. That day he finished it very soon and came, water drops dripping and with a towel round his middle.

Father had a silk dhoti and a silk towel. He used to wear them on the death anniversary days of our grandfather and some auspicious occasions. Their colour was neither yellow nor brown but something in between. The border was green in colour, a span in width. When the rays of the sun fell on it, it would sparkle. The dhoti and the towel would be used only 10 or 12 days a year. The rest of the year they would be folded and kept in the almirah and they would have an especial smell. Whenever they were taken out of the almirah the scent of camphor would permeate the entire place. When father was surrounded by that scent I used to like him much. As though that day was a special one, father had that dhoti around his waist and the towel thrown over his shoulder.

The murungai branch had been cut only a few minutes earlier. Sap was surging from it. The smell of a fresh green tree came out of it. The thin outer skin had been crushed and there was the green inside. Father dug a hole and set that branch firmly at the centre of the vacant space. Mother

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helped him in planting it. When she bent down to hold the branch, the back of her shoulder got wet because of the towel tied round the coil of her hair. I was watching at the fun of it.Soundara ran, brought a bucketful of water and poured it all around the branch. Mother went to the third house, brought some cow dung and placed it at the top of the branch. All through that morning the murungai was the subject of our talk. Father and I went to our offices late that day. So also Soundara to her college.

For the next few days we completely forgot about the murungai branch. None of us felt that the murungai had come into our lives.

Agog with excitement, one morning Soundara woke me up from my bed.

"You devil, why do you take my life out at this early hour?"

"Anna, come and have a look. The murungai branch has sprouted!"

Instantly I sat up.Both of us came down. Round the murungai the entire household was present.

The murungai branch looked like a blasted one, stark and thin. On its bark at many paces there were green dots - dots like green grams stuck to the branch. To see the spirit of life throb to push its way up thrilled me. Even without my being aware of what I was doing I stretched my fingers to touch them."Shh, don't touch,"said grandmother.Shouldn't point one's fingers out at children, flowers, leaf buds. Shouldn't touch them also. Touching would harm them.

From that day onwards the first thing we did soon as the day dawned was to have a look at the murungai. Every node of it grew as we watched. The leaf bud, the size of a blackgram, the branch it would send out like a tender nerve, its leaf resembling a green pea, its ever new leaf buds breaking forth now and then - everything took place before our very eyes. I had stitched two shirts during this period for me. Since my full pant became tight it had to be loosened. One day, secretly, I plucked one - its only leaf, put it into my mouth and tasted it. It savoured deliciously.

The first day we used that murungai stands vividly before my eyes even now-as though it is in my heart.Mother had to melt butter.Grandmother said that if butter was clarified with murungai leaves it would give an excellent aroma.Mother followed her instructions.We used that ghee for lunch.Was it the peculiar quality of that murungai tree or the state of our mind? The ghee had a special taste that day. The leaves in the ghee too were tasty. Those tender leaves of the murungai. That mother should have plucked them and used them thus.This thought disturbed me.

Many times the murungai branch reminded me of Soundara because of the manner the sapling had transformed itself into a full-size tree.Mother gave birth to Soundara at a time when the best part of her life was nearing its end. There was a difference of 15 years between Soundara and me.

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I had been seeing Soundara at close quarters from the days of her childhood. I had been seeing the green tree from the very day it sprouted. She turned on the mat; her eyes saw only the calf of my leg; seeing that alone she cried making me understand that she should be lifted. The tree swayed its small twigs in the breeze and befriended me. A new skirt and blouse were stitched for Soundara on the day she went first to the school. She wore the skirt trailing. In the dry, desiccated branches there were bunches of green fruit. Soundara matured; she was seated and garlanded - in the middle of the hall. Her smile expressed her shyness. She ate 'puttu' and 'kali' and the usual rituals were performed. All these scenes of Soundara and the murungai passed through my mind one after the other.

When I took the cycle and started to go to my office the murungai would wave its hand. Would look as though it talked. For our conversation there was no need for words. Feelings were enough. The eyelids became lips.

When Soundara occupied the chair in the middle of the hall, the murungai branch too did. Between its legs shadows gathered. Father and I decided to lean our cycles against the tree. In the noonday heat I would place my easy-chair below the murungai and lounge. In the soft breeze and the delight of the shade I lost track of time. It had become a matter of routine to read and write under the tree. Till darkness set in my reading and writing would be under it. And away from it I couldn't do these things.

My college days were on the banks of the Kaveri. It was an ancient tiled house. I learnt Sanskrit. Like the people of those days the houses also were big ones. A broad verandah. In the middle was a courtyard. Inside the house itself our teacher had a murungai tree. It was under it I had my schooling. If only it had a tongue it would have recited Ramasabdam and Godastuti in a more mellowed tone and with a deeper devotion than I did. Sitting under its shade many students would have had their rudiments of learning.

One day our teacher said that the murungai was a brhma-vriksha. The bark, the roots, the leaves and other parts of the tree added to man's potency, that vital force that perpetrated the human race. Brhma is the Lord of creation. So also is the tree. Hence it is known as brhma-vriksha. From that day whenever I looked at the tree I saw in it the four-headed Brhma. The teacher, the children, all of us grew in the shade of the brhma-vriksha.

A bridegroom was chosen for Soundara. She too liked him. The marriage was celebrated soon after. When she left the house with her husband she wept.So too father,mother,grandmother,and myself.Separation from relatives is always a sorrowful affair. Among those Soundara loved the murungai tree would certainly be one.

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Of late women began to frequent our house. Women of mother's age. Women of the opposite house, the next house, the third and fourth houses. Because of age they would be mostly stout or very thin. When I entered the house they would pass me in a hurry. Their body odour would hit me right in the nose. The pungent smell of chilly powder, the smell of coriander, the odour of dirt, the stink of unwashed body. Unfailingly each of them would have in their hands a bunch of leaves or two or three fruit. Pretending that they had come for something else they would feel highly elated, laugh and chit-chat when mother herself plucked the fruit and gave them. Mother was not of that type who went to neighbouring houses for gossipping. She was not interested in that. Therefore, women had generally slighted her. Now they came there because the murungai was there.

Those who had used the leaves of our tree told us that the leaves tasted like honey and that the fruit were sweet. Mother would take it as a compliment to herself.

To reach the sky appeared to be its ideal. It had neither a thick growth nor was it stout and strong. Even though its top touched the sky, to me it appeared a toddler.

One day people with their hideous teeth popping out cut down all the trees. They put up stones one over the other and built houses and crematoriums for them. Hence all kinds of birds left their nests and flew all over the sky. The murungai tree became the abode for crows and sparrows.

The sound of human beings and the roar of machines were a din to our ears. That stage passed and the chatter of birds became music to us. Could see the top of the murungai tree through the window of my room upstairs. Even lying in my bed I could see it. It became a habit of mine to open my eyes after hearing the song of some bird or other.

It would be a very pleasant experience to meet face to face a phase of the world in the first pale streaks of dawn when the rays of the sun did not touch the earth, to hear the chirping of a house-sparrow, the caw of a crow or the twitter of a mynah that came rarely or the sound of a karuvaattuvaali. We would be surprised to see how people could live by themselves in their houses. More than human beings it was the world of birds that welcomed the dawn with eagerness and joy. Their enthusiasm and playfulness would be equal to the romping of children in the maidan. They would spread their wings and jump from one branch to another. With their beaks they would brush their chests. At evening time they would appear differently and make calls in a distinct manner. In that tone could be felt the contentment that the day's activities were over and the peace and the anguish that the day had come to an end.

When we looked at the murungai tree filled with birds and loaded

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with fruit, in a way it would resemble a grandfather jumping up and down with his grandchildren on his shoulders. All of a sudden it would heave a sigh as though it had completed a thousand years. That would be a pitiable sight. Immediately it would dance with joy like an youngster.

Not a day passed in our house without a dish prepared with some part of the murungai. Murungai fry made of leaves; murungai koottu; murungai sambar. That sambar with its own refined taste. I liked it very much. The fruit would be used to make a tangy sauce or fry. Some such dish would always be there. We liked all the products of our tree.

A headmaster came and occupied the third house from ours. He was the seniormost teacher in a very big school. Even after he occupied that house in our street we were looking after our affairs in our own way. To him we seemed to be insignificant creatures. When he went from or came to his house along our street he used to walk looking up at the sky. The man of the opposite house tied his cow to the pillar in the verandah of the headmaster's house and milked the cow. The headmaster came out and hopped up and down in a fit of temper, his hair dishevelled and his cloth and towel flying about him. People of the street experienced only that day how anger grated in his voice. Another day he came to see me. He was in his official dress. He chatted about the low standard of modern education, cinema, flour-machine, family planning and many other topics in Elizabethan English. No, it is wrong. He alone talked. Finally, "Hey.. a murungai tree..," he said. No need for me to confirm that statement. It was indeed a murungai tree. I plucked some fruit and leaves and gave them to him. He had a fine set of teeth.

Nowadays it had become impossible to sit under the murungai tree in the evenings. Suddenly there would be a downpour of rain. Time did not fail in its duties. There was a chill in the air and it was pleasant to sit inside the room. The mud road was wet and miry. One had to take one's step carefully. Often the wind would roar, lash and become a hindrance to daily life. Wild wind went past our village.

One day it was raining. I went to my office. Even when I was inside the office there was a whirlwind. The shutters of the windows banged uncontrollably and instilled fear in our hearts. The whirlwind stopped. There was perfect calm. I returned home for my lunch.

In front of our house there was a huge crowd of children and old people. The murungai tree lay stretched across the entire street. Its twigs like slender fingers. Leaves like dots. In between, yellow leaves like golden spots.

People took as much as they could of the leaves, fruit and fuel. Even while we were watching this the place where the tree stood turned tidiness itself.

Mother, father and grandmother were standing a little away. I took

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the cycle and stood it at the usual place. A habit to keep the cycle in the shade of the murungai tree. The tree appeared as though its waist had broken. It seemed as if half of it was sunk under the ground and the other half was dirt-streaked.

Only the next morning I felt the impact of its absence. Yesterday it was. Today it was not. Only the stump remained.

Some days passed.

One day I came down from upstairs for my morning coffee and as usual stood by the murungai tree. Wonder was waiting for me there.

From the stump of that tree there was a small sprout at one place.

It was life.

Translated from Tamil by
M.S.Ramaswami

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He had said

Chandradhar Sharma Guleri

I

Pedestrians who have been lashed by the sharp tongues of *ikka* and *tonga* drivers are invited to soothe their ears with the honeyed words of Amritsar's bamboo-cart drivers. Ikka drivers go tearing down the wide streets of large cities, whipping their horses without mercy. They seem to be the very embodiment of the world's despair, and drive straight on, looking neither this way nor that. They accuse those very pedestrians of blindness whose feet they crush under their cart-wheels. Meanwhile their comrades, the bamboo-cart drivers of Amritsar, slide gently through narrow, winding streets. Their patience is boundless as the sea. They yield the right of way to every oxcart. "Take care, Khālsājī....Step aside, brother...Come along, Lālājī...Wait a moment, good Sir ....To one side, Your Majesty....", With such courteous words on their lips they drive slowly through the jungle of mules, geese, men in white turbans, and porters carrying loads of sugarcane. No one steps out of their way without being coaxed and addressed as *Ji* or 'Sahab.' Not that their tongues don't wag. They do, but only with strokes that are as sweet as they are effective. If an old lady refuses to budge, even after repeated requests, the driver's vocabulary is something like this : "Take care, O Long-lived One ....Step aside, O Beloved of the Children...O Fortunate One Why come under my wheels? Save yourself...".

Walking in a leisurely manner in between bamboo-carts, a boy and a girl met each other at a shop in the *Chowk.* The boy's long hair and the girl's loose trousers showed they were both Sikhs. The boy had come to buy curds for washing his uncle's hair. The girl wanted *baris* for the

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Ikka : A two - wheeled horse carriage, with a single platform for passengers, regarded as the common man's transport.

Tonga: also a two-wheeled horse carriage, but of higher hire , with a partition between the driver and the passengers.

Khalsaji: A term of respect used while addressing a Sikh.

Lalaji : Members of the merchant community.

Ji , Sahab: Honorific affixes to a name or title.

Chowk: Shops built around a square, usually in the centre of town.

Baris: A kind of dumpling made of vegetables or lentils, ground and dried.

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kitchen. The shopkeeper was busy with a difficult customer who insisted on counting all the *papads* in a wet bundle.

"Where's your home?" the boy asked.

"In Magra....and yours?"

"I am from Manjha....Where are you staying?"

"In Attar Singh's guest-room. He is my uncle."

"I am also visiting my uncle. His house is in Guru Bazar."

The shopkeeper was now free to attend to them. They bought what they had come for and left the shop together. After they had gone some distance the boy smiled and asked : "Has your *kurmai* taken place?" *"Dhut!"* the girl exclaimed, widening her eyes in mock anger, and ran away. The boy stood gaping at her.

They met again, off and on, at the milkman's or at some vegetable stall. This went on for a month. They boy asked her again, twice or thrice, whether her *kurmai* had been performed, and received the same response : *"Dhut!"* But one day, when he teased her with the same question, the girl answered unexpectedly : "Yes ,I am engaged."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Don't you see my silk-embroidered stole?"

The girl hurried away. The boy turned homeward. On the way he pushed a little urchin into the roadside gutter, overturned a snack-vendor's basket, upset a jar of milk in a cauliflower cart, threw a stone at a stray dog, and butted into a nun who was returning from her ablution and who bestowed upon him the title of Blind Bumpkin. After accomplishing all these things, he reached home.

"Ram, Ram! What kind of a war is this!" said Lahna Singh. "We sit in a trench day and night. Our bones are stiff. It's ten times as cold as in Ludhiana. And the frost. And snow on top of it. We are calf-deep in mud. The enemy is nowhere to be seen, but every couple of hours there are earsplitting explosions and the earth leaps up a hundred yards. If we survive these rockets, we will fight. I'd hear about the earthquake at Nagarkot. Here we have twenty-five earthquakes every day. If an elbow or a turban shows from the trench for a moment, there's an instant shot. God knows where and how these scoundrels conceal themselves —— flat on the ground or covered with grass".

"Lahna Singh, there are only three more days to go", Subedar Hazara Singh consoled him. "We've already spent four days in the trench. The relief party will come on the day after tomorrow. Then we get a week

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Papad : A spiced savoury Punjabi Pastry made out of Kangni Seed.

Kurmai : Engagement ceremony.

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off. We will cook mutton with our own hands, fill our bellies, and sleep. We'll rest in the French lady's garden-house. What a hostess! She pampers us with fruit and milk and never accepts money. Says to me : 'You are a prince. You have come to save my country".

Lahna Singh said : "I haven't shut my eyes for four days and nights. A soldier is restless out of combat like a horse out of exercise. Oh, how eagerly I am waiting for the order to raise my bayonet and march! Then if I return without killing seven Germans single-handed may I be denied the privilege of bending my head at the doorstep of *Darbar Sahab.* The rogues! Cowards! At the sight of a bayonet they gape in fear and take to their heels. But at night they pelt us with three-ton cannon-balls. The other day, when we went on a raid, not a German was left alive within a radius of four miles. The General Sahab ordered us to turn back, or else..."

"Or else you'd have marched straight to Berlin, isn't it?" said *Subedar* Hazara Singh with a smile. "It is not for a *Jamadar* or a *Naik* to take decisions in a war. The big officers think ahead. The front extends for three hundred miles. What will happen if we advance too far in one direction?"

"You are right, Subedarji", Lahna Singh said, "but tell me —— what are we to do? The bitter cold has entered our very bones. The sun doesn't come out. On either side of the trench, there are icy streams. If we go on a raid it would warm us up."

The Subedar made the round of the trench, giving orders. "Get up, Udmi, put some charcoal on the stove. Wazira, take ten men with buckets and throw the muddy water out of the trench. Mahasingh, it's getting dark. Change the guard at the entrance of the trench."

Wazira Singh was the clown of the battalion. He filled a bucket with water, poured it out of the trench, and said : "I am the priest. Let's perform the last rites to the King of Germany." Everyone laughed at this and the clouds of dejection lifted.

Lahna Singh filled another bucket, handed it over to Wazira, and said : "Pour this water in the melon patch in your kitchen garden. You'll never find such fertilizer anywhere in Punjab".

"Yes, the soil here is very rich. After the war I'll request the Government to give me half-an-acre of land here. I'll plant an orchard."

You'll bring your wife here?Or will the generous French lady do?

"Shut up....The people here have no shame."

"Different countries have different ways, Wazira. I've tried in vain to tell her that the Sikhs don't smoke. She insists on my smoking and

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Darbar Sahab: The golden Temple at Amritsar, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs.

Subedar, Jamadar, Naik : Non-commissioned ranks in the Indian army, in descending order of seniority.

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presses a cigarette between my lips. When I step back, she thinks that the prince is angry and won't fight for her country any more."

"And how is Bodha Singh now?" Wazira asked.

"He's all right".

"As if I didn't know ! You cover him with your own two blankets and spend the night by the stove. You stand guard in his place. You put him to bed on dry logs of wood and remain on the muddy ground yourself. Take care or you'll fall ill. The winter here is death incarnate. Those who die of pneumonia don't enjoy prize lots of land when they retire."

"Don't worry about me. I am not going to end my days in some foreign land. I'll die near the *khud* of Bulel. My head will be in the lap of Kirat Singh. And the mango tree which I planted in the courtyard will give me shade."

"What's all this talk about dying?" Wazira Singh said with annoyance." May the Germans die....and Turks! Sing, brothers, sing!."

O Fair One
On your way from Delhi to Peshawar
May your trade in cloves prosper!
And make a good bargain in trouser-bands.
Smack your lips and enjoy the spiced pumpkin.
The pumpkin curry is delicious,
Go for it, O Fair One.

Who could have imagined that these bearded householders would sing such frivolous lines? But the song echoed through the trench, and the soldiers were fresh again as though they had been resting and merry-making for the past four days.

It is the middle of the night, pitch-dark, absolutely silent. Bodha Singh is sleeping on two blankets spread over a bed improvised out of biscuit tins. Lahna has given him his overcoat and blankets. He is standing guard, with one eye on the entrance and the other on Bodha Singh's emaciated body.

Bodha Singh groaned. "What's the matter, Bodha Bhai?" Lahna asked. "Give me some water", Bodha muttered. Lahna Singh put the mug of water to his lips and asked : "How are you feeling now?" Bodha Singh

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Khud: A small ravine

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drank the water and said : 'I am shivering. My teeth clatter. Every nerve in my body is quivering."

"You'll be all right. Here, take my pullover."

"But what about you?"

"I am near the stove and I am hot. I am perspiring."

"No, I won't take your pullover. For the last four days you have.... for my sake....".

"Oh, I just remembered", Lahna Singh cut him short. "I have another woollen pullover. It came only this morning. English women are knitting sweaters and sending them to us. May the Guru bless them!"

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Would I lie to you?" And so Lahna Singh compelled Bodha to put on his pullover, and stood guard wearing only a drill shirt. The pullovers sent by English women were purely fictional.

Half-an-hour passed. Someone called from the entrance of the trench: "Subedar Hazara Sing!"

"Who is that? Lieutenant Sahab? At your command, Sir." The Subedar stood stiffly at attention and gave the military salute.

"Listen", the visitor said. "We have to carry out a raid immediately. There is a German trench about a mile away, to the east. There are not more than fifty Germans in that trench. Under these trees you will find a path which cuts through the two farms.There are three or four turns in the path. I have posted fifteen men at each turn. You have to go and join them, leaving only ten men here. You are to capture that trench and wait there until further orders. I will remain here."

"Yes, Sir", said the Subedar. The men started getting ready. Bodha also removed his blanket and was about to get up when Lahna stopped him. When Lahna himself moved forward the Subedar — who was Bodh's father — made a sign with his finger pointed at his son. Lahna took the hint. He knew he was being asked to remain behind. All the men were eager to go, and there was quite a dispute between them. Ultimately the Subedar selected his men for the raid. They all set out.

The Lieutenant Sahab stood near Lahna Singh's stove, looking the other way. He took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. After a few minutes he held out a cigarette to Lahna and said : "Here, take this. Have a smoke."

Lahna Singh grasped the situation at once*. But he concealed his suspicion and said : "I'll take it, Sahab." While stretching his hand to reach for the cigarette, he had a good look at the sahab in the glow of the charcoal stove. He saw the sahab's hair and became still more suspicious.

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*Tobacco smoking is strictly forbidden by the Sikhs by religion. Hence Lahna Singh's surprise and suspicion on being offered a cigarette.

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He wondered how the Lieutenant's well-groomed hair had disappeared within a day and been replaced by the close-cropped hair of a prisoner. Perhaps the sahab is drunk, he pondered. Perhaps he had just found the leisure to have his hair cut so short.

Lahna Singh decided to test him. After all, the Lieutenant had been in his regiment for five years. Could he be mistaken about his own officer?

"Sahab", he said, "When are we going back to India?"

"After the war. Why? Don't you like this country?"

"No, Sahab. I miss the pleasures of a shikar. Do you remember our expedition to the Jagadhari forest last year, after our battle exercises?"

"Yes, yes."

"You were riding a donkey. Your *khansamah* left us on the way and went off to offer oblations at a temple."

"Yes, I remember. The scoundrel! He disappeared!"

"A nilgai came right on to the path and faced us. Your shot hit her on the shoulder. The bullet came out from her back. It's a delight to go hunting with an officer like you. Sahab, didn't you send the nilgai's head to Simla for stuffing? You told us you wanted to hang it on a wall in the Regimental Mess."

"Yes, I did say that. But later I decided to send it to England."

"What wonderful horns that nilgai had. Must be at least two feet long."

"They were two feet and four inches, Lahna Singh. You didn't smoke the cigarette I gave to you?"

"I'll smoke in a moment, Sahab. Let me get a matchbox!

Lahna Singh went inside the trench. Now there was no doubt in his mind. He quickly decided upon a course of action. In the dark he bumped into someone sleeping on the ground. "Who's that? Wazira Singh?" he asked. "Yes, Lahna", Wazira Singh answered, "What's the matter? Has *qayamat* arrived? I wish you'd let me sleep for a little while."

"Yes, *qayamat* has arrived, and is wearing our Lieutenant's uniform".

"What!"

"Our Lieutenant Sahab has been either killed or imprisoned. A German has come, dressed in his uniform. The Subedar didn't see his face, he only heard his orders.I've seen his face and talked to him.The devil

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Khansamah: House-steward and butler.

Qayamat: The final destruction of the world. The deluge. Hence, calamity personified.

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speaks pure Urdu — bookish Urdu. And he has given me a cigarette!"

"Now what's going to happen?"

"We are finished. It's a trap. The Subedar and his men will get bogged down in the mud. Meanwhile our trench will be raided. When the Subedar's party returns, it will be attacked on the open ground. Look, now you have to do something. Follow the trail left by our men. They couldn't have gone too far as yet.Ask the Subedar to return immediately. Tell him that the story about a German trench is false. Go. Slip out from the rear exit of the trench. Quiet. Not a leaf must be ruffled. Go at once."

"But our orders are...."

"To hell with orders ! Now I am giving the order — I, Jamadar Lahna Singh, the senior most officer am present here just now.Get going. I'll take care of the fake Lieutenant."

"But you are only eight."

"Not eight. We are ten lakhs. Don't you know that a single *Akali* Sikh is worth a lakh and a quarter?"

Lahna Singh returned to the entrance of the trench. Leaning against the wall, he kept a careful watch.

The Sahab brought out from his pocket three sticks of dynamite, each as big as a *bel* fruit. He inserted them in the wall at three different places and joined them with a wire. At one end of the wire was a knotted cotton string. He kept that near the stove. He lit a match and was about to ignite the string when Lahna Singh lifted his rifle with both hands and, with the speed of lightning, struck the sahab on the elbow with the butt of the rifle. The matchstick fell from the sahab's hand. Lahna struck another blow on his neck. The sahab exclaimed "Ach! Mein Gott!" and fell to the ground unconscious. Lahna Singh removed the three sticks of dynamite and threw them out of the trench. He dragged the sahab inside and placed him near the stove. Going through his pockets, Lahna recovered four envelopes and a diary. He put them safely in his own pocket.

The sahab regained consciousness. "Well, Sahab", Lahna Singh said, laughing ironically, "How is your health? Today I've learnt a lot. I've learnt that the Sikhs don't smoke cigarettes; that there are nilgai in Jagadhari district and they have horns two feet four inches long. I've also learnt army officers ride donkeys and Muslim butlers offer oblations at Hindu shrines. But tell me, who taught you to speak such chaste Urdu? Our own Lieutenant can't speak five words without saying 'Damn!'.

The Sahab pretended to warm his hands by putting them in his trouser-pockets, which Lahna had not searched.

Meanwhile Lahna Singh continued : "You are very clever but I've

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Akali: A Sikh sect, known for the martial prowess of its members.
Bel : A hard-shelled fruit about the size of a large apple.

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spent years with Lieutenant Sahab. You'll need four eyes to deceive Lahna Singh of Manjha village. Three months ago a mullah came to my village from Turkey. He gave medicines to children and bracelet-charms to women. These charms were supposed to ensure progeny. He sat all day on a cot under a banyan tree, smoking his hookah. 'The Germans are great scholars', he used to say. 'They studied the Vedas and learnt from those sacred texts the secret skill of making aeroplanes. They don't kill cows. If they come to India they'll stop cowslaughter.' He tried to mislead the traders, telling them that the British rule in India was about to end and that it wasn't safe to keep money in post offices or in banks. Polhu Ram, the postal clerk, was quite scared. I had the mullah's beard shaved off, drove him out of the village and warned him not to set foot in our village, or else...."

The Sahab snapped a revolver from his pocket and fired. Lahna was wounded in the thigh.Two shots from Lahna's Henry Martin ended the Sahab's mortal career. The men in the trench heard the shots and came running. "What's that?" Bodha shouted. Lahna Singh told him he had shot a stray dog. When Bodha went back to sleep, he told all the others what had happened. They took out their rifles and got ready for an encounter. Lahna cut up his turban and bandaged his thigh. It was a flesh wound. When it was tightly bandaged the bleeding stopped. Moments later, seventy German soldiers rushed into the trench, yelling. The Sikh rifles stopped the first wave, then the second. But they were only eight. Lahna stood up and took aim, others lay flat on the gound. Stepping over the bodies of their dead comrades, the Germans advanced. Within a few minutes they would have finished off the defenders.

But suddenly war cries were heard from the rear of the Germans : "Victory to the Guru ! Hail, the Guru's *Khalsa* : "The Germans were caught in cross fire. From the rear, Subedar Hazara Singh's men hurled fire upon them. And in front Lahna Singh's comrades charged with their bayonets. When the Subedar's men came closer, they too started bayoneting the Germans.

Another loud roar : "Here comes the Akali army ! Hail ! Victory to the Guru ! "The battle was over. Sixty-three Germans were dead or groaning on the ground. The Sikhs lost fifteen men. A bullet went right through the Subedar's right shoulder. Lahna Singh was hit in the ribs. He plastered the wound with some damp clay and tied it with the remainder of his turban which he used as a waistband. No one knew Lahna had another wound, and a much more serious one.

The moon had risen during the battle — a crescent moon described by the Sanskrit poets as 'consumptive'. And a cold wind was blowing — a wind which was, as Banabhatta would have put it, "Like a teacher discoursing with the help of a teeth-lute" * Wazira Singh was telling his com-

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coursing with the help of a teeth-lute".* Wazira Singh was telling his comrades how large and heavy lumps of damp French soil stuck to his boots when the men heard the full story from Hazara Singh,they praised him for his presence of mind."Without you",they said,"We'd all have perished."

Sounds of the battle had been heard by men of another unit of the Sikh regiment posted in a trench three miles away. They contacted Lahna Singh by telephone and despatched two doctors and two ambulance vans which arrived after an hour-and-a half.The field hospital was not too far away, no more than a night's drive. The bodies of those who had died in the battle were placed in one of the ambulances. The wounded were given first aid and put in the other ambulance. The Subedar wanted Lahna's wound to be treated. But Lahna said it was not serious and could be attended to in the morning. Bodha Singh had developed high temperature and was delirious. He was taken into the van on a stretcher. The Subedar was reluctant to leave Lahna behind. But Lahna said : "In the name of Bodha, and in your wife's name, I urge you to climb into this van."

"What about you?"

"You can send a vehicle for me when you reach the hospital. In any case they must be sending vehicles to carry the German casualties. I am not so bad. Don't you see? I am standing without any difficulty. And Wazira Singh is with me".

"All right, but...."

"Has Bodha been carried into the ambulance? Good. Now you can get in. Listen, when you write to the *Subedarni* please convey my respects. And when you get home, tell her I've done what she wanted."

The ambulance vans set off. As he climbed into the vehicle, the Subedar pressed Lahna's hand and said : "You've saved my life, and Bodha's life. There'll be no need to write a letter. We'll soon go home together. Then you can tell the Subedarni whatever you want to say. But what is it that she asked you to do?"

"Now you get into the van quickly", Lahna said. "Just write to her. And when you meet her, give her my message."

As soon as the vehicles drove away, Lahna Singh lay down. "Wazira, give me some water", he said. "And loosen my waistband. It's dripping."

When death approaches, old memories sharpen. The events of a

Banabhatta, The seventh century Sanskrit poet was the author of *Kadambari*. In the metaphor cited here, chattering of the teeth because of extreme cold is likened to the sound of a lute.

Subedarni: A subedar's wife.

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whole lifetime appear in procession, one-by-one.The hues are clear. The accumulated dust of time is wiped clean.

Lahna Singh is a boy of twelve. He has come to Amritsar for a few days and is staying with his uncle. He meets an eight-year-old girl — at the vegetable stall, at the curd shop, at other places. Whenever he asks her is she engaged, she says *"dhut!"* and runs away. But one day, when he asks her again if she was engaged, she unexpectedly says : "Yes, I was engaged yesterday. Don't you see this stole with silk-embroidered flowers?' Hearing this, he is sad. He is angry. Why?

"Wazira, give me some water", he said....

Twenty-five years have passed. Lahna Singh is now a Jamadar in the seventy-seventh Sikh Rifles. He had hardly given any thought to that eight-year-old girl. He does not even remember if he met her afterwards.

Lahna Singh was home on a week's leave to attend to some legal work regarding land revenue. He received a letter from his superior officer asking him to cut his leave short and re-join the regiment as they had been ordered to go to the front. He also got a letter from Subedar Hazara Singh. "We will go to the front together. My son Bodha and I have also been asked to report." The Subedar was very fond of Lahna and his home was right on the way. So Lahna accepted the invitation and went to his village.

When they were about to leave, the Subedar said : "Lahna, my wife knows you and wishes to see you. Go and meet her." Lahna went in the woman's apartment in the house. He was surprised to hear that the Subedarni knew him. Since when, he wondered. The Subedar's family had never stayed in the regimental quarters. Where could she have met him?

He greeted her at the door. She returned the greeting and asked : "Do you recognize me?"

"No", said Lahna.

" 'Are you engaged?'...'*dhut* !'...'Yes, I am engaged... the *kurmai* was performed yesterday... Don't you see? I am wearing a silk-embroidered stole'... At Amritsar...Do you remember all this?"

Emotions clashed. He came out of the trance and turned over. His wound was bleeding profusely.

"Wazira, give me some water", he said.

Lahna Singh is dreaming again. The Subedarni is talking to him : "I recognized you at once. I am going to ask you a favour. Oh, how unfortunate I am! The Government has honoured my husband with a title, and has given us land at Lyallpur. Now is the time to show our loyalty. But why did the Government not form a women's regiment, so that I might have accompanied him ? I have only one son. He joined the army only a

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year ago. Four sons were born after him. None of them survived."

The Subedarni was crying.

"Now both father and son are going to the front. That's just my fate! Do you remember you once saved me from being trampled to death? Near the curd-vendors's stall, when a tonga driver had lost control over his horse, you risked your own life to save mine. Now please look after my husband and son, I beg of you."

Unable to check her tears, the Subedarni went into the *obri* . Lahna wiped his eyes and came out of the house.

"Wazira, give me some water", he said.

Wazira singh is sitting still, with Lahna's head in his lap. He is giving water to the dying man from time to time. For half-an-hour, Lahna was quite. Then he said : "Who's that ? Kirat Singh?"

Wazira thought for a moment and replied : "Yes, it's Kirat Singh".

"Raise me a bit, brother. Put my head on your lap". Wazira did what Lahna had asked him to do.

"Yes, that's much better. Give me some water. This mango tree will give a lot of fruit next summer. You and your nephew should sit here and enjoy the mangoes. You know, this mango tree is as old as your nephew. I planted it the same month your nephew was born."

Tears streamed down Wazira Singh's eyes.

A few days later the newspapers carried this bulletin:

France and Belgium. 68th Casualty list. Died of wounds in battle ; Jamadar Lahna Singh of the 77th Sikh Rifles.

Translated by
V.S.Naravane

Obri: The inner apartment of a traditional house.

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Prakrit Love Poetry

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

The *Gāhākoso* (or *Gāthāsaptaśatī*) of Sātavāhana Hāla, one of the oldest anthologies of Indian poetry, is a collection of songs dating from the second century AD. These stanzas have been translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra.

Mother, were he abroad,
I'd bear the separation
waiting for him,
but to live in separate houses
in the same village
is worse than death.

43

Hair dishevelled,
eyes lightly closed,
thighs sweating,
tired, lying on me,
you now know
a man's tribulation.

52

The way he stared
I kept covering myself,
not that I wanted him
to look elsewhere.

73

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His form
in my eyes,
his touch
in my limbs,
his words
in my ears,
his heart
in my heart:
Now who's
separated?
132

Day's work done,
the sad harvestman
idles in the field,
avoids returning
to a widowed hearth.
169

To keep from spiteful tongues
her love for you,
she looks at everyone
with equal affection.
199

The village
destroyed

The heart
ecstatic

Houses
burning

I passed him
the pitcher
229

Nailmarks on jaded
breast thigh buttock:
The basement of the god of love's
derelict house.
233

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They snatch him from me
as a jujube berry
from a blind man's bowl
and they're jealous still:
O mothers,
their very tails are forked.
240

As husbands get older,
poorer, uglier,
good wives love them
all the more.
293

Tired from ploughing
muddy fields
while the labourer sleeps
his concupiscent wife
blasts the monsoon.
324

Careful, girl.
Slipping secretly
into the night
for the tryst,
looking brighter
than a flame.
415

Like two noble warriors
laid low in close combat,
your breasts even fallen
look handsome.
427

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For our quarrels
let's appoint another night:
the bright one slips by.
466

They laugh
but don't show the teeth

Travel
but don't cross the threshold

Observe
without looking up

Twice-born women!
526

He's the beginning,
middle, and end
of every conversation:
Aunt, is this
a one-man village?
650

The ploughman's not displeased
with what he in the dawnlight
sees: A green track, a wanton's secret
route, winds through his dewy sesame field.
695

The monsoon about to break,
travellers hurry towards home,
shortening, dividing, gulping
the miles.
696

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Book Reviews

Realism and Reality : The Novel and Society in India; Meenakshi Mukherjee: Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985;218pp;Rs. 125.

In a sense, Meenakshi Mukherjee has given us the key to her book and her intention in writing it, when she writes of Saratchandra Chattopadhaya, the evergreen, popular Bengali novelist— "Any literary evaluation of Saratchandra cannot quite be delinked from his cultural significance, and when the literary critics have finally given him up, perhapn the sociologist will take up for further scrutiny the phenomenon that is Saratchandra" (p. 24.).

From the first chapter, Dr. Mukherjee has formulated her definition of the novel and then made subsets within the definition. This conceptual analysis occupies the first three chapters of the book. Then a chapter is devoted to Saratchandra and the last three chapters are taken up with analyses of three novels (*Pather Panchali, Godan* and *Samskara*).

Two types of criticism are possible of this book. In the first place, one could consider whether the conceptual tools used by the author are sufficiently complete or sufficiently adequate to shed new light on the novel in india. And secondly, whether the author has revealed anything significant either about Indian society or the Indian novel.

In the preface, the author has told us what she does *not* intend to do. She is not writing a history of the novel in India nor can she cover the whole range of Indian literature in all its very many languages. Of the three novels taken up for individual attention, she refers to *Pather Panchali* and *Godan* in the original Bengali and Hindi respectively and *Samskara* in Dr. Ramnujan's English translation.

Although she is not writing a history of the Indian novel,

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she cannot escape from the border line of history and sociology to which her intentions commit her endeavour. She distinguishes the novel from such genres as fable or allegory and distinguishes the quintessential hero of the modern novel as a problematic hero and not an epic hero. A problematic hero in her terminology is an individual who shapes his own destiny and works for himself, unlike the epic hero whose achivements are the paradigms of his culture.

The book's richest sections are those where the author investigates what hapens when Indian novelists write novels based on their own culture using the model of the European novel, which is a product of such a different culture. These differences in the socio-cultural milieu and the resultant products so skillfully analysed by Dr. Mukherjee are the main strength of the book rather than any rigid compartmentalizing of conceptual tools.

One of the most important charactistics of the novel as it emerged in Europe was the role of the protagonists in shaping their own destiny. Even in the Eighteenth century, Voltaire in *Candide* and Diderot in *Jacques the Fatalist* were making fun of the notion of preordained destiny. And Daniel Defoe had introduced such problematic and individualistic heroes and heroines as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flonders*.

In response to this model, we find in India, such works as O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* where the author indulges in normative (or should-be) reality when the heroine chooses her own husband., Dr. Mukherjee writes "In the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, this conflict between rebellious passions and the accepted social norm sometimes become a central concern... but even at the cost of the artistic integrity of the novel, Bankim had to accede that the demands of social order were higher".

India was a British colony till 1947 and all the novels taken up for discussion in this book, except *Samskara*, are of the pre-Independanceera. It seems as if the author is divided between two definitions of realism, one definition of a higher order ("the fidelity to actuality involves a focussing on the immediate, the here or now, on details of the visual world, on specific human action and its verifiable consequences") and the other of a lower order ("with total servility they imitated mediocre English novels" — "realism came to be held as the highest mode of perception and a good word from the English press the highest conceivable reward"). Thus, in one sense, what Mukherjee is doing, analysing the influence of mediocre "social realist" novels of Imperial Britain on Indian writers, can be seen as a study of the colonial mentality and in that way, the book can be extremely limited in value. As she writes, "India's

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first generation novelists had hardly any access to Tolstoy, Melville or Flaubert". Or one could say, no Indian writer of the colonial era (except perhaps Manik Bondopadhaya) shows any influence of Zola, Dostoyevski, no humour or social awareness comparable to Mark Twain, no innovation comparable to Virginia Woolf or Joyce, no courage comparable to D.H. Lawrence.

What emerges from Mukherjee's treatment of colonial India's literature is a picture of a sterile, stagnant society, antipathetic to the growth of a full-blooded novel. All the novels discussed by the author including the work of Saratchandra, seem bloodless and anaemic, if not just out-and-out cheats and shams. The novel in Europe and America evolved in a time of social mobility. In India, there was no social mobility, only in the upper castes entering the colonial bureacracy. A colonial Indian's greatest ambition was a bureaucratic job and an Indian novelist desired no more than a pat on the back by the British Press. Ofcourse Saratchandra Chattopadhaya is different but while as a man, he was a rebel, as a writer, he was an opium vendor. The other peculiarity of the Indian situation and the Indian novel was that while Europe had, since the Middle Ages, developed a tradition of love and courtship, India did not have this tradition. "Where girls were married off by their parents before puberty, there was very little scope for emotional relationships of the kind depicted in the English novel which the educated Indian enjoyed reading".

The three novels which Dr Mukherjee has taken up for individual scrutiny are beyond the boundaries of her depiction of the colonial Indian novel. *Pather Panchali, Godan* or *Samskara* are not realistic novels of any particular genre of mediocre novels aping the British novel. But, on the other hand, these novels also defeat the purpose of this book because if the book is concerned with generalities or with finding the influence of mediocre, social, realist novels on India's novelists, the realism of these 3 books lies only in their truthfulness to the realities of the cultures from which they spring. Of course, this type of realism is also one of Mukherjee's definitions. But to see the realism and reality of *Pather Panchali*, *Godan* or *Samskara*, one does not need to have any bookish knowledge of history or sociology. To understand Apu of *Pather Panchali*, who is a dreamer, or Gobar of *Godan* who rejects his father's values or Praneshacharya of *Samskara* who is torn between meaningless tradition and personal truth, one only has to live one's life on this earth and look around at fellow human beings.

The way in which Apu, Gobar, or Praneshacharya are more real than any character of Saratchandra or of mediocre colonial writers, is not because they truthfully reflect any particular social

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reality but because they are true to the universal, abiding problems of human life on earth, which may take place anywhere in the world. Despite her stated intentions, this second definition of reality overtakes and overides Dr Mukherjee's venture at the end of her book and makes her work a stronger piece of writing than it would have been if it had only been a history or sociology of the realist novel genre in colonial India.

Amitava Ray

The Krisna Cycle in the Puranas. Themes and Motifs in a Heroic Saga. Benjamin Preciado-Solis: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984; 151 pp and 75 black and white illustrations; Rs. 150.

Under the impact of the Freudian revelations about the unconscious, the condensation, displacement and substitutional gratification implied in dream imagery, the sensing of ritual as a symbolic relating to cosmic processes and of Jungian speculations on the collective unconscious, our age has got rid of the old notion that myth is an other people's superstition and has seen its affinity with the modalities of poetic perception. And it now seems possible for us to endorse Wheelwright when he says that myth-consciousness is the "bond that unites men both with one another and with the unplumbed Mystery from which mankind is sprung and without reference to which the radical significance of things goes to pot".

But it is also true that in some circles there has been an unhealthy tendency to develop a *mystique* of the myth. Reacting against it, Richard Chase deplores the attempt to make myth autonomous, "a religion without calling it a religion". Chase does not want the hard won results of the objective disciplines to be relaxed and therefore insists that myth cannot enable us to perceive reality as the rational objectivity of the mind perceives it. The creatively rehandled myth can remedy the weaknesses in traditional myth and become wholly positive. Santayana wrote: "A rational poet's vision would have the same moral functions that myth was asked to fulfil, and fulfilled so treacherously; it would employ accurately the same ideal faculties which myth used confusedly."

But such creative rehandling is very difficult. T.S. Eliot attempted it yet the myth in *The Waste Land* is a crazy quilt of motifs drawn from the lore of many peoples and epochs, and critics like Herbert Read have referred to the "archaeological" nature of the resulting amalgam. But in the *Mahabharata* and especially in the Gita, Vyasa was able to re-handle myth to create integrative philosophy and Edgerton accurately sums up the achievement. "He (Krishna) was apparently a deified local chieftain, the head of the Vrsni clan. Indeed,

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he appears as such, in strictly human guise, in the greater part of the *Mahabharata*. In the Gita he is still both God and man, an incarnation of the Deity in human form. We know nothing of the process by which he attained divine honours, none of his earlier history as a god, before the Bhagavad Gita, which is probably the earliest work presented to us in which he appears as such. In this work he has all the attributes of a full-fledged monotheistic deity, and at the same time, as we shall see, the attributes of the Upanishadic Absolute."

Slochower has written about the function of myth. "The myth addresses itself to the problem of identity, asking 'who am I?' And it proceeds to examine three questions that are organically related; 'Where do I come from?'; 'Where am I bound? and 'What must I do to get there?' In mythic language, the problems deal with Creation, with Destiny and with the Quest." Vyasa's creatively re-handled myth takes up these questions and frames answers that integrate empirical knowledge and philosophical insight. That is why his re-creation has the enduring humanistic significance which the original legends of Krishna lack in themselves. Nevertheless, these legends and the way they grew over time are also fascinating and it is this story that Mexican Indologist Preciado-Solis has tried to reconstruct in this book. It has been a commendably thorough achievement and he has reviewed almost the entire work done in this field by a large number of scholars.

There are references in the Rig Veda to Vishnu, an all-pervasive deity within whose three steps the whole universe is comprehended, and to Narayana, the primal being from whose body the universe is formed. These symbolisms are absorbed by the Krishna figure later. The name 'Krishna' appears in the Rig Veda but does not seem to have any relation with the later Puranic hero. The Chhandogya Upanishad refers to a Krishna who was the son of Devaki and the disciple of the sage, Ghora Angirasa. Yaska in his work on etymology (fifth century B.C.) refers to the episode of the stealing of the Syamantaka gem, an important incident in the Krishna story. Panini in his grammar (fourth century B.C.) refers to the followers or devotees of Vasudeva and to Arjuna. The birth and death of Krishna are referred to in Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, reputedly of the fourth century B.C. and Patanjali, in his commentary on Panini (second century B.C.) also has some obscure references to Vasudeva.

The most intriguing reference in antiquity is the statement made by Megasthenes that the tribe of Sourasenoi dwelling in their land with two great cities Methora and Kleisobora (Mathura and Krishnapura?) and a navigable river Jobares (Yamuna?) worshipped Herakles. Several scholars have investigated the hero stories of the ancient world and found Hercules a common

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pattern can be discerned in many of them. But in several details like for instance the Bana episode in the Krishna story and the Geryon episode in the Herakles cycle, the two traditions come together much closer than is possible through identity of generic features of the type story. As the author finally concludes, Krishna is not Herakles. The stories grew separately, both having antecedents in their own tradition - Herakles in Zeus and Apollo, Krishna in Indra. But interaction was very much possible and the borrowings need not all have been one-sided. And then, two or three centuries before the commencement of the Christian era, a genius combines in a marvellous philosophical poem all three aspects of the Krishna figure: Krishna the preacher of selfless action, Krishna the god and Krishna the hero. The Gita comes to form a most important part of the *Mahabharata*.

It is a pity that the photographic reproductions are of an indifferent quality for they are of importance. A whole new series of early Krishna representations found at the Surali temple, Badami, is presented for the first time. Another important series presented and discussed for the first time is that of the Lara Jongrang temple at Prambanam, Java.

Krishna Chaitanya

Righteous Rama : The Evolution of an Epic J.L.Brockington. Oxford University Press. 1985 363 pp. Rs. 180

This book is a comprehensive study of Valmiki's Ramayana, its aim being to set the epic in its total context. The author with his excellent knowledge of Sanskrit language begins with a close linguistic study of the text and establishes the relative chronology of the different layers of its composition and on that basis investigates the material, cultural, social and religious milieux as they are revealed at different periods. In that the author differs from all earlier writers who assigned the whole work to a single period. In his opinion, Bala and Uttara Kandas are later additions and the core chapters, i.e. books 2-6, show a uniform language and style. The contents and style of each chapter enable several successive stages of composition to be determined. He analyses the language and style of Valmiki's Ramayana in relation to the transition from earlier to classical Sanskrit and this is the basis of charting the various layers of composition on internal and relatively objective evidence. The linguistic data presented in the second chapter are therefore central to the argument of the book but may safely be omitted by those readers whose interests are cultural rather than linguistic, provided that they are willing to take on trust the division into stages propounded in the final part of what chapter.

By means of this division

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into stages, the information which can be drawn from the Ramayana on cultural aspects is significantly enhanced and we are able to see how the Ramayana, like the even more extensive Mahabharata, reflects the changing culture. We can discern in its different layers the last stages of Vedic religion, exemplified in particular by the early prominence of Indra, followed by the rise and fall of the relatively short-lived importance of Brahma which gives way in the latest stages to an incipient Vaishnavism. New light has been shed on the transition between the Vedic religion and later Hinduism. Similarly the Ramayana reflects a social pattern at a transitional phase between that of the expansion of Aryan culture across northern India and the settled pattern of village based agriculture which is so much a feature of modern India - the change from a heroic age to a caste society.

Comparison with the Mahabharata and the Puranas contributes to a fuller understanding of the textual history of the Ramayana. The new light shed on the text also prompts a reconsideration of its influence on later Sanskrit and vernacular literature as well as its spread outside India. For, as Rama developed into a figure for veneration and more particularly came to be seen as an *avatara* of Vishnu, later generations of Indian poets continued to retell and adopt the legend down to the present day.

The first chapter entitled 'The Background' takes into consideration the subdivisions of the work, a summary of the story and earlier views on its date and nature. The author opines that the original version composed by Valmiki dates from hoary antiquity and was transmitted orally and the extant version was undoubtedly composed over several centuries between 500 B.C. and 300 A.D. during which it was commited to writing. He also admits that there is a kernel of historical fact around which the epic has developed. A Gujarati scholar has recently tried to prove in a doctoral thesis that Rama was a historical figure. The earlier parts of the Ramayana were composed in what is basically a simple straightforward style although certain more complex constructions become more frequent in later parts of the text.

I would like to comment on a passage on the Rakshasas on page 204. Today the word Rakshasa means devil or demon, but even the most knowledgeable among us do not know that the term as used in the Ramayana denotes the name of a tribe to which Ravana belonged. This tribe had its own culture and social mores.

The most interesting portions of the book are the two chapters devoted to Adaptations of the Ramayana in Sanskrit and other languages. These take into account the diverse versions available not only in the various Indian province but in Central and Eastern Asian

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countries also. There are also references to the Ramayana story in the puranas, plays and poetry. These would serve as rich source material for researchers.

The multiplicity of adaptations of the Ramayana extant throughout India and much of Asia amply attests to the popularity and the inherent appeal of the story first made popular by Valmiki; the evidence drawn from them, when combined with the internal evidence of the work ascribed to Valmiki, enables us to chart more accurately the process by which its hero developed from a moral hero to a divine figure whether as the *avatara* of Vishnu or Bodhisattva as well as the decay or suppression of this deification in the Islamic environment. At the same time it is possible to assign certain chronological limits to the successive stages of growth of the original Ramayana and thereby to improve our understanding of the development of some aspects of ancient Indian culture.

Though the author's erudition and rare understanding of the subject can by no means be doubted, yet it can be said that consultation of critical treatises in Hindi and other regional Indian languages would have given him more insight.

Subhasini Aryan

The Still Small Voice Balu Rao: Kaveri, Delhi, 1984; 72 Pp; Rs. 25.

An epigraph always brings its contextual habitation with it: its references ought not be obviated. Its proper understanding therefore is essential to appreciate the poet who uses it. It is difficult to gauge the complex ramifications of J. Alfred Prufrock's predicament and the gyrations in the abyss of his own soul without first placing the Dantesque epigraph (i.e., "...since none ever did return alive from his abyss...without fear of infamy I answer you") where it originally belongs. Similarly the lines from *Measure for Measure*

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both

fully prepare the reader of 'Gerontion' to see the holograph of an old man, "A dull head among windy spaces" waiting for rain and wondering in "chilled delirium" at "a sign", i.e. "The word within a word, unable to speak a word, swaddled with darkness."

A well-chosen epigraph enriches the poem and serves as a dependable tuner to enable one to hear its strains right. This becomes evident when we look at the title poem of Balu Rao's *The Still Small Voice*, a collection of honest poems born out of an experience of nearly a lifetime, and salvaged, so to say, out of the past years by dint of an "unerring critical insight" of a poet friend.

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'The Still Small Voice', the poem, carries an epigraph from *The Bible*: "and after the fire a still small voice" (I Kings, 19:12). The epitaph indicates that there is more than the poem to be taken into account, and the very first reading may not suffice. A hasty commentator might say that the poet has fallen for the mere phrase to denote his own modesty through the adjectives like 'still' and 'small'. After all, Balu Rao is 54 and *The Still Small Voice* is his first ever volume of poems consequent upon his 35 years of low-grade nightingale fever.

Back to the epigraph and the poem. In *The Bible*, the truth by word of the Lord, heard or spoken by His men is the point at issue amidst murderous opposition, infamy and hunger in the wilderness ever long and wide. This word was not heard by the 450 prophets of Baal though they called out his name from morning till noon: "But *there was* no voice nor any that answered" (17:24). Elijah, the man of God did hear 'the still small voice' after the wind, the earthquake and the fire. The still small voice is the word of truth, the insuppressible grassforce that always bursts forth. Ronald Bottral uses the phrase in a similar sense when he interprets the myth of the Fall of Man in his poem, *Adam Unparadised*:

But the temper spoke so well

Your still small voice was so distant

And the fruit so knowledgeable

The my credulous hand curled like a plant

Around the obliging apple.

But Balu Rao's stance is different from that of Bottral. Balu Rao writes that 'the wanton spree of tyranny and terror, death and separation, a thousand other stings of humiliation' cannot quell the voice. It rises:

like a sperm in the womb,

a seed in the soil,

gathers life feeding on the pain of its own memory

sucking strength from the hardy earth

and from the magic light,

air, wind and waters of the sky.

Balu Rao's title poem is an aside on his aesthetic of poetry engendered by the 'still' moments tempered by the fury of wind, earthquake and 'fire's cussed orgy'. The well-tempered moments in the mind of the poet gather life sperm-like, grow and go forth. The process calls to mind Elijah who heard on the mount "a still small voice" which gave him the words of truth to mouth among the Israelites. Balu Rao writes:

The word

in calm contemplation

builds itself up...

gaining in meaning...

To find out whether Balu Rao's poetry takes after his aesthetic, whether it has the prophetic proclivities of the faithful will yield

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his poems are personal,

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reflective social and political. The poet is more worldly than a consecrated man of faith. His 'Prayer' even is conditional and outspoken. It recalls to mind Nissim Ezekiel's tone in his *Hymns of Darkness* and *The Latter-Day Psalms*. Here is Balu Rao's 'iffy' prayer:

If you want me to bow to you, O God,
See that these hands are ever free;
If you wish that I also pray to you,
the voice too should remain free.
Only if God granted his share of both, that too before it is too late:
Then only we both can stay in peace,
You in high heaven, I in my hole here.

Anyway, the poet's belief that God *is* is enough for the profane times. As such his concerns are those of a conscientious, humane, and sensitive social being. He is happy to see a boy in his late teens reading poetry "with such absorption as at copulation", for "the world has been spared one man-hour of ugliness." One wonders if the poet intends it to be an evidence of poetry's therapeutic efficacy. 'Ah, This Many-splendoured Freedom' sums up his reaction against the Emergency imposed in the country in 1976, when, beside other things, one was supposed to understand that "you can eat your crumbs better with your mouth shut". 'Hiroshima' is the most successful poem in this category. The poet makes a journey from the present to the crucial moment in the past and back. He picks up a handful of Hiroshima earth (which is no earth) and feels the sod's "strange blue luminescence" changing into red hot fire which began to burn his hands. The sod was thrown away "as if it were a handgrenade." The poet continues: "And in a moment a thousand volcanoes erupt in the hills all around and spew molten lava which comes flooding in menacingly towards me. Giant trees on the hillside catch fire and come crashing down... Everywhere around, it is light... blinding light, oppressive light, light as thick and heavy as darkness." The poet comes back from the point of the holocaust. "There is now a cinder-shaped scar on my palm," says he. The scar will stay and expand all over the body "cancerously", like Hiroshima, the Expansive Island, for ever expanding. The whole experience of 'Hiroshima' reminds one of Whitman's words: "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there" (Song of Myself).

The autobiographical element is rather prominent in Balu Rao's poetry. He concentrates on the truth about himself and makes poetry out of it without deviation or falsification. In the process, of course, the autobiographicality gets toned down, making the recognition of universality of the truth possible, at times even self-evident.

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"This, too, My Love, is Love" reflects the poet's own mid-fifties mood, yet it can be taken as a poem about a couple's two some togetherness during the mellowed and post-menopausal years, when "passion have cooled," and "Thought now is all, self-manifest without words or action". The sun is setting on them, "Yet there are no regrets, no remorse for nothing is changed, nothing is lost." Still a few moments of separation seem:

long and weary
as when you were away at your mother's
for the birth of our first child
or I on my postings in neighbouring towns.

The understanding between the two is perfect as ever. "For Father with Love" is still another example where the autobiographical element gets enlarged. This is achieved even though the poet is "autobiographical to a fault". The poem reflects the portrait of a father of the first quarter of the twentieth century with its feudal propensities intact, a father, stern and almost severe, but swaddling a soft core of affection within.

The "grateful remembrance" of the father beside, it is the conjugal love between the two together that needs be stretched to eternity. For that the dictum seems to be "Let's keep our distance" from the swan-like lures. As such "This distance is enchanting." If you go too near:

Feet get stuck
in muddy banks
Swans too swift.

The swans are the snares;"gold is mere veneer; and green is of the moss"..."Proximity is dangerous".

Such beacon lights are essential to keep one's world from tottering. In default of this precaution, introspection will invariably find only one's self to blame:

Sitting alone
on the broken
pavement
of my heart
I cough
My sorrow out
in slimy
globules of phlegm
and spit at
my own face
for I know not
whom to blame.

A poet with a strong inbuilt morality will not write otherwise.

Balu Rao stays nearest to the truth as he sees it. But what he sees is precisely what it is in life around him. There are therefore only the controlled flights of imagination. His poetic aesthete allows nothing more than this. He closes upon his subject and goes round it once and again as a spider around its prey. He is the least experimental of Indo-English poets. Surprisingly, where one expects a simile he gives an anti-simile, a contrast rather than a comparison. He is the master of succintness as is evident in 'Cain and Abel':

The same seed
The same womb
The one who [illegible] Haridwar

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hand
became Cain
The other who gave his
head
became Abel

And together
they made the Quran

Ajit Khullar

The Ganga Trail: Foreign Accounts and Sketches of the River Scene
Jagmohan Mahajan: Clarion Books, New Delhi; 158 pp, plates; Rs. 325.

The prominence of Ganga, the sacred river of the Hindus, dates back to the Rig Veda period. From those days down to the present the sacred river and its goddess Ganga after whom it was named, have been worshipped all along. The river has been worship-ped not only at Gomukh, its source or at its mouths where it meets the Bay of Bengal but also at every city, town or village through which it dances down to the sea.

Several legends are associated with this holy river. The main legend is given in the story of Bhagiratha who after continued penance was able to persuade the gods to let the Ganga come down to the earth so that it could flow over the ashes of his ancestors. The whole world would have been flooded if Siva would not have contained the mighty torrents in his hair and let it flow slowly later.

The legend conveyed symbolic meaning to the Hindus. But as time passed by, this sacred river grew in popularity. More cities, towns and villages got settled on its banks besides several centres of pilgrimage, including Hardwar, Varanasi and Prayag.

The water of Ganga became known as the water of immortality. Besides bathing in the holy waters, people would carry it to long distances for the rich, or the sick and the dying.

Foreign visitors were attracted by the river for exploration and navigation purposes from time immemorial. Jagmohan Mahajan has used their accounts in the *Ganga Trail* and illustrated them by the sketches of the river scene done by the foreign artists.

The book begins with the account of Megasthenese who came to India in 302 BC as Ambassador of Seleucus at the court of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenese confirmed the fact that the river was being worshipped by the Hindus. From Megasthenese to the beginning of Ibn Batuta's visit in AD 1333 Mr. Mahajan has been able to cite only two important travellers: Hiuen Tsang and Al-Biruni. Definitely there have not been any other important travel accounts of the period available.

Hiuen Tsang stayed in India for fifteen years and was able to visit several cities and centres located on the Ganges. At Prayag he observed how a large number of people sacrificed themselves in

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order to attain salvation. Hiuen Tsang also refers to a remarkable assembly of devotees at Prayag which has been the spot of Kumbh Mela.

In the book a small chapter on Ganga water is very interesting. An account from the *Ain-i-Akbari*, though not a foreign account, describes that Akbar would only drink Ganges' water both at home and during travels. He had established a separate department to look after the distribution of water. The use of Ganga water by the Mughal rulers is confirmed by Edward Terry, Joannes de Laet and Francois Bernier. Jean de Thevenot says that the water was "much esteemed for its medicinal properties".

Customs and ceremonies observed on the bank of the Ganga forms yet another interesting chapter in the book. Ralph Fitch was surprised by the men whose faces and heads were shaven on its banks; Tavernier was impressed by the temples of Varanasi while Thevenot by the 'incredible concours' of pilgirms who came to Allahabad to have their beards and hair shaven and also to bathe in the river in order to get purified. Bernier watched the Hindu rites for the disposal of the dead. He reports: "I have attended these funeral rites on the Ganges several times, and observed plights of crows fluttering about the carcass, which becomes as much the prey of those birds as of the fish and crocodiles".

The fairs and festivals celebrated especially at Hardwar and Allahabad also attracted a good numbber of visitors.To Captain Thomas Skinner the Fair at Hardwar in the 1830s was unforgettable. He found at the festival people of all ages and complexions. "No spot upon earth can produce so great a variety of the human race at once assemblage, and it would be impossible to enumerate the articles of different sorts or even the countries that produce them, offered for sale in the street" Sidney Low in 1905 had a similar experience at the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad. "The Sangam, the sacred triangle below us, was covered to its last inch by a swarming, shifting, variegated crowd".

The two chapters on 'Scenes from a Budgerow' and 'Up the River' contain some accounts of the picturesque scenes with the descriptions of the Rajmahal, Colganj, Allahabad and Varanasi. However, Varanasi has been alloted a separate chapter in the book which is mostly based on the nineteenth century accounts. One such example could be that of Emma Roberts. "The views of Banaras from the river are exceedingly fine, offering an infinita and untiring variety of scenery, of which the effect is greatly heightened by the number of trees, whose luxuriant foliage intermingles with the parapets and buttresses of the adjacent buildings". She also reports: "the ghats are literally swarming with life at all hours of the day. . No written description, however elaborate, can convey even a faint idea of the

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extraordinary peculiarities of a place which has no prototype in the East".

The chapter on the source of Ganga should have been in the beginning, preferably as chapter two, soon after the one entitled 'Oriental Sapphire' and not in the middle of the book. As very few travellers travelled to the Himalayan regions before the seventeenth century, not many firsthand accounts of travels are available. However, Mr. Mahajan makes two important observations in this chapter. First, James Bailie Fraser was the first European to reach Gangotri on 20 July 1815. And, second that Captain Hodgson was the first European to go beyond Gangotri. He had reached Gangotri on 26 May 1817. I believe that Mr. Mahajan refers, to only those Europeans who maintained diaries of their travel.

The accounts of the flora and fauna along the banks of the Ganga provide a great deal of insight for a layman who has not visited the Gangetic plains. One not only gets the accounts of the popular animals such as wild buffaloes, deers, crocodiles, elephants and tigers but also of the feathered tribe such as, patridges, florikens, quail, monaul phesants, the Indian Jabiru, the Argali and so. This chapter on flora and fauna contains very few accounts of the flora. However, the accounts and illustrations of the popular banyan tree are very much there.

The two chapters on navigation are at the end of the book. The use of steamboats was introduced by the British in the 1830s in order to improve transport facilities. The accounts of Louis Rousselet, Mark Twain, Thomas Bacon and Captain Mundy provide a scenario that reveals how fast in the nineteenth century the British developed first the river transport along the Ganga and then shifted to a relatively faster mode, the rail transport. This led to the laying of the railway line from Calcutta to Delhi.

The text is profusely illustrated with ninetytwo illustrations mostly in black and white followed by a useful bibliography and an index. Books on Ganga could be based on religious texts, historical accounts, literary works, oral traditions, on-the-spot observations and the accounts of foreign visitors.

Jagmohan Mahajan has covered the last aspect well in this book. The book should be of great use to those who wish to know how this sacred river was appreciated and explored by the foreign visitors.

H.K. Kaul

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indian horizons

Krishna Chaitanya 1
The Eisensteinian Image and The Ramayana

V.S. Naravane 8
Bankim Chandra Chatterji: His Life, Work and Influence

G.N.S. Raghavan 30
Music as a Mode of Transcendence

K.S.Duggal 36
The Taxi Driver

Bunny Reuben 40
No Beautiful Tomorrows

Jayanta Mahapatra 48
Ten Poems

Book Reviews 57

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The Eisensteinian Image and The Ramayana

Krishna Chaitanya

Sergei Eisenstein's *Film Sense* is not just a book on the techniques of cinematography, but an important contribution to aesthetics. More specifically, it is a study of the subtler problems of the creative enterprise which involves an objectification of the poet's vision in such a way that it can rise again in the interiority of the reader or spectator.

When poetry endures over the millennia, as the Indian epics have done, it has to be because it had complete grasp of the strategies of creativity; it is unlikely that today's analysis will discover absolutely new principles not consciously practised or unconsciously followed by the great poetry of the past. Nevertheless, the clarification and discussion of the principles is a valuable humanistic contribution and can in turn help in an enhanced appreciation of the heritage. Here it is proposed to cite the fine and fully articulate perceptions of Eisenstein regarding the image and note their anticipations in Valmiki's *Ramayana.*

The creative process, says Eisenstein, proceeds in the following manner. "Before the inner vision, before the perception of the creator, hovers a given image, emotionally embodying his theme. The task that confronts him is to transform this image into a few basic partial representations which, in their combination and juxtaposition, shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator, reader, or auditor, that same initial general image which originally hovered before the creative artist. This applies both to the image of the work of art as a whole and the image of each separate scene or part." If Eisenstein is more familiarly remembered for his principle of montage, it actually relates to the need for transforming the basic image into partial images, this being essential for sustaining extended episodic narration. In the face of "the need for connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action," montage becomes the principle for ordering the succession and juxtaposition of the particular images. "Each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given particular representation of the general

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theme that in equal measure penetrates *all* the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that general quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into that generalized image, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme."

There is not only an anticipation of these principles in the *Ramayana*; but, instead of following the method of intellectual analysis, Valmiki has revealed them through a delectable parable; further, he has given a humanistically widened base to the structure of the theory here.

The episode from which the epic takes off is no mere anecdote, but a profound parable of the creative process. The incident runs thus. One day when Valmiki went out into the forest in search of firewood and grass for his daily ritual, he saw a happy pair of birds, billing and cooing on the branch of a tree. Suddenly, the male bird is shot dead by a hunter's arrow and the female bird utters a heart-rending cry of anguish. A spontaneous utterance wells up from the poet's heart and emerges from his lips, condemning this crime. Immediately after he speaks, he notices that the flow of spontaneous expression had a perfect rhythm and melody. He ponders on this miracle and, through deep introspection and analysis of the state of his mind at the time of its utterance, he discovers for this profound mystery of the unconscious creative process a solution which he gives out to his pupils in these words: "That which proceeded from me who was deeply stirred by sorrow could be nothing but poetry of rhythmic expression." Ananda Vardhana of the ninth century, over a millennium later, one of the most brilliant of Indian aestheticians, rightly saw in this significant parable the embryonic form of the Rasa theory according to which emotive experience is the soul, the fundamental basis and inspiration of the rhythmic expression that is poetry.

There is a broadening of theory beyond Eisensteinian parameters here. He commences with the image. As we shall see, the image of separation, in many variations, becomes the basic motif of the epic. Eisenstein had also gone further back than the image itself, he tried to account for its genesis and specificity: the image that rises in the inner vision of the creator is one that emotionally embodies his theme. In Valmiki's case too, the repeated image is coloured by the poignant emotion of tragic separation. But, if the genesis of his poem is in the unexpected experience of the tragic, Valmiki devotes considerable thought to the imperatives that have to be kept in mind in the elaboration of this unique experience, and a fortuitous one too, into a vastly expanded epic. We hear the poet discoursing on this to his pupils. Art has to be the expression of feeling and implicit here is the requirement that the feeling has to be the response of a sensitive heart; otherwise the explosion of an outcry will not mellow into the

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poignant yet musical cadences of an elegy. This, in fact, was the first aspect noticed by Valmiki in his introspection. But he proceeds to say that communication is as important as expression since otherwise the latter will remain private, hermetic, and autistic. The poem which grows out of the emotional experience must have the highest virtues of communicability; the language should be grammatically flawless, intelligible to scholar and layman alike, the narration should be in stanzas of spacious metres, and musical like a melody on strings.

But the most important aspect noticed and mentioned by Valmiki is that which concerns the relation between art and life. One cannot stop with texture or metrical music or any other segmental value. Art has to be cognitive too, in the sense of being capable of yielding a vision of life. This vision, says Valmiki, takes in all the values of human life, but recognizes a hierarchy among them. It should give its due place to the satisfaction of the sensuous but legitimate impulses, to Eros (*kamarthaguna-samyuktam*). But the dominant accent should always be on man as a moral being *(dharmarthaguna-vistaram)*, on moral responsibility, on the dignity which man gains when he accepts the obligations implied in an ideal character. Thus the serious poem which seeks enduring human significance should, deal with the idealized man because it seeks to make man move nearer to the ideal.

While Eisenstein starts with the feeling-saturated image, Valmiki does not give autonomy to it but integrates it into a comprehensive world-view. Radical transformations of primary experience are required here and the unique feature of the epic is that these aesthetic-philosophical imperatives are discussed with analytical clarity though in experiential contexts that belongs quite naturally to the plot which is the prime metaphor of the poet. What is initially communicated by the episode of the bird-pair would seem to be a vivid sense of the ultimacy of death and also its fortuitous, casual advent. Like Ecclesiastes, who lamented the autumnal fate of things and saw life governed by chance during its tenor and ultimately extinguished by death, many in ancient India also had drifted to nihilism, or rationalized their way out of it into cynicism. In a crucial episode of the epic, Valmiki squarely confronts such views and what leads to the episode is again an instance of tragic parting, the basic image whose variations structure the epic.

Compelled to send Rama into exile, his father Dasaratha cannot survive the separation and dies of a broken heart. Bharata goes into the forests to inform his brother of their bereavement and to persuade him to return. Rama senses that Bharata may probably have a guilt feeling here since it was the ambitious desire of his mother to make her son king that led to the exile of Rama and the death of Dasaratha. Therefore, when Rama dwells at length on the transience of life, it is also meant to make Bharata

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see the futility of bewailing. But the obsessively serial images of parting and dissolution also show that the transience of things has deeply wounded the sensibility , agonizingly puzzled thought."All acquisition ends in loss, all rise in fall, all union in separation, all life in death. Man forgets death in the exultation of living . But death is man's shadow, sitting with him when he sits down, walking with him when he walks, hastening with him when he accelerates the pace, lying by his side when he lies down. Every sunrise and every season we greet take away a part of our life. Beings come together and separate in life like logs of driftwood on the sea." Death casually coming upon man in the exultation of living is a generalized and variant image of the death that brought tragedy to the bird-pair. These sombre reflections develop a momentum towards pessimism or to a riotous hedonism, the day-long revelry till the night descends. But the narrative here has a surprising development. Jabali was listening to these words of Rama and also to his final rejection of Bharata's appeal that he return to Ayodhya. He tries to turn Rama's own arguments against his decision and as a basis for a philosophy of hedonism. If beings meet and part like driftwood," he who thinks this is my father, this is my mother and becomes attached to this relationship is without sense. Dasaratha is naught to you as you to him". Why then be bound by obedience to Dasaratha's order of exile which in turn was forced by the latter's promise to Kaikeyi , a promise that could easily have been broken?"O Rama, be wise ! There exists no world but this, that is certain. Enjoy that which is pleasant and abandon that which is unpleasant. Adopting this universally valid principle, receive the kingdom offered to you by Bharata!" .

Rama's reply reveals another remarkable anticipation of a contemporary philosophical perspective which cannot be dwelt upon at length here but has still to be noticed. It shows how profoundly existential, how much akin to that of Sartre or Camus in certain respects, was Valmiki's vision of life. One should recall here the generic features of humanistic existentialism listed by Hazel Barnes after a detailed study of Sartre, Camus and others and to note their anticipation in the ancient Indian epic. Barnes enumerates the features as being:"the concept of the absurdity of existence, the concern to justify man's resolve to live meaningfully in the face of an indifferent universe, the ideas of authenticity and bad faith...a feeling for the absolute value of the individual combined with the recognition that one cannot today live wholly innocently - all this based on an explicit or implied psychology which holds that every man is free but that we are responsible for the situation within which a freedom must choose itself." Rama, in his reply to Jabali, affirms his conviction that the man of high ideals can and should create meaning even if it be that life lacks meaning in itself. In the last analysis, life is not obedience to external command, but a self-attestation. "It is his conduct that renders man

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virtuous, a coward or a hero, and transmutes impurity into purity.The self in our heart is the witness of all our good and bad thoughts and words and deeds. With my five senses contented I lead my life in this world without deceit, with faith in values and with competence to distinguish right and wrong....The sea will overflow its shores before I transgress a promise given to my father."

If the world is a casual drift, the accidental can yet be transformed into the significant. When that is achieved, man's character creates meaning out of the neutral drift of events. The inner movement of the epic is from the tragic, as the fortuitous to the tragic, as the sought and accepted, in the pursuit of an exalted self-affirmation. Since the image and its variations are our prime concern in this paper, let us see how this life-view is expressed through episodes that are images given narrative and structural substance.

The initiating image of the epic is the tragedy of the bird-pair. But it was fortuitous and if the image of parting and separation incarnates repeatedly in the nodal episodes of the epic, its aspect of the accidental is rapidly shed. Aristotle also has noted that meaning cannot be created out of accidental misfortune. King Dasaratha was a great hunter. One day, while out hunting in the forest, he hears a sound from the river which he interprets as that of an elephant drinking water and he shoots an arrow in that direction. But it was really the sound of a young man filling his pitcher from the river. He is the son of an old couple, who are both blind and utterly helpess without him. The young man is killed and the old couple, feeling the separation unbearable, end their life after cursing the king. He too shall die of the sorrow of separation from his son. There is an element of the fortuitous in this tragedy, but it is not so totally unqualified as seems the tragedy of Oedipus. The Greek tragedies based on the crimes of the Atridae, heart-chilling though they be, are not unassimilable because punishment is traceable to transgression: but the tragedy of Oedipus is a tormenting puzzle, for his errors were all fortuitous. In the Indian epic, in this episode, the fortuitous does not obtrude so unassimilably; the hunter could and should have been more careful in forest sounds. The unassimilable in the basic experience and image is shed.

Dasaratha wants to make his eldest son Rama, born to his queen Kausalya, the heir-apparent. But his other wife, Kaikeyi, wants Rama to be expelled to the forests and her son Bharata to be made the heir. The king cannot refuse because, once in the past, he had promised her two boons. Rama decides to go to the forest to shield the honour of his father who had given his word. Dasaratha does not long survive the separation, but the tragedy here is even less fortuitous, for it is linked to his integrity, the accepted and not imposed imperative to honour the pledged word. There are subtle variants of the basic image. Kaikeyi's demands are met,

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but this brings about the separation of widowhood. Her son, Bharata, is loyal to Rama and the mother's ambition, though on his behalf, alienates the son from her. The image of the stricken bird fades for a while when Rama and Sita get reconciled to the life in the forests. But it surges up again when Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, the warrior king of Lanka. Ravana is at last vanquished, Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya and there is a brief interlude of happiness. But the citizens whisper calumny about a queen who was in the power of Ravana in Lanka and Rama feels that he has no choice but to abandon a wife who is unacceptable to his subjects, even though it will break his heart. The lament of the abandoned Sita is heard by the self-same poet who was stirred by the cry of the bird. Sita is taken under his shelter. She gives birth to two sons, Lava and Kusa.

Engulfment in the tragic is pain. But holding it at arm's length, contemplating it, aesthetically shaping it, is to transform it, to invest the merely painful with the dignity and purifying power of the tragic. So Valmiki composes his great epic poem out of the sequence of events so far and Lava and Kusa recite it like young bards from the hermitage at the imperial ceremony of Rama.There is recognition, a short-lived reunion. But Sita is required to go through the fire-ordeal once again- she had to do it in Lanka before Rama accepted her after the battle and this time, the ground opens and goddess Earth, the mother of Sita, takes her away from an existence which had offered the brimming cup of suffering again and again. This time the separation is final. But issues of human integrities, debatable though the human decisions will continue to be, have transformed the basic image, where the fortuitous dominated, into serialised images involving man's responsibilities as a moral being and structuring the consequent experiences that web into the story of the epic.

There is another aspect of the creative use of imagery mentioned by Eisenstein and used by him in filmmaking. This relates to the control of the succession of images and the variations in their perspectives for gaining for the virtual space of art the same amplitude and extension in depth as those of the world which art seeks to mirror, and for strengthening the emotional tone of the basic image. Eisenstein has shown that sensitive poetry possessed the insights here long before the advent of the film by citing poets like Pushkin and Milton. The description of the approach of the hosts of Satan in *Paradise Lost* opens with a 'long shot', changing to a closer view as they draw nearer and Eisenstein draws attention to the most "cinematographic instruction to change the camera set-up:' nearer view'."

...and nearer view
Bristled with upright beams innumerable
Of rigid spears, and helmets throng'd and shields
Various...

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We can see this use of changing perspective in Kalidasa's *Cloud-Messenger* too . The camera looks up vertically to see the cranes with silver pinions wreathing a wind-blown garland in the sky, looks down from a great height to see the Narmada scattering into many a stream on the rock-strewn foot of the Vindhyas, moves to a very close close-up to see the madder turning brown due to the half-blown filaments or the Ketaki blooms blown at their apex gilding white the hedgerows of Dasarna.But Kalidasa's treatment of nature is very obviously inspired by Valmiki's In the latter's description of autumn, the camera first looks up. "The fury of the thunderclouds has abated and after having shed their waters they have disappeared in their airy flight...The sky has cleared and is as bright as a drawn sword." The camera now points to the earth, though retaining association with the sky.". The surface of the lake, with a solitary swan floating there asleep amidst countless water-lilies, resembles the heavens free from cloud, illuminated by the moon and myriad stars." There is a close close-up. "In the fields in the shallow swamps adjoining the lake, the paddy stalks bend with the weight of the golden grain and brush the pollen of the lotuses.

But just as the feeling-tone of the basic image was not ultimate for Valmiki and he integrated it into a world-view that upheld deep integrities the description of nature from many perspectives is not meant merely to gain amplitude for the panorama . Valmiki believed in the great riches to the spirit which a communion with nature could yield. Rama 's words to Bharata— "all aquisition ends in loss, all rise in fall" - indicate that the sudden reversal of fortune, from rulership to exile, had indeed caused a hurt; a careful reading of the epic will also disclose that Rama was not without ambition and was looking forward to its fruition in the official elevation to the status of heir-apparent. But nature insensibly acts on him, his sensibility increasingly responds to it. When he comes to the Chitrakuta hill, the beauty of the spot makes him exclaim: "Lovely Sita, when I behold the Chitrakuta hill and the Mandakini river in your company, I feel a greater joy than any Ayodhya could yield me".It is significant that most of the descriptions are given, not directly by the poet, but by Rama who points out the varied beauty of nature to his wife or brother. The images of nature are thus seen by us as nursing steadily to strengthen the new perceptions of Rama. Desire subsides and torments no more". Beloved, bathing thrice a day with you in the river and living on honey, fruits and berries, I feel no desire for the comforts of Ayodhya." And the poet himself at last adds a definitive comment. "Living on the pleasant Chitrakuta hill by the river , Rama forgot the capital and remembered his renunciation no more".

The other great epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, also shows anticipations that are in some respects more brilliant than those of the *Ramayana*. But their discussion has to be postponed to a later occasion.

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Bankim Chandra Chatterji: His Life, Work and Influence

V.S. Naravane

I

Every morning, all the year round, radio stations in India begin their programmes with a song. More than a century has passed since this song first appeared in a novel,*Anandamath.* The novel is now rarely read. But the song, *Vande Mataram,* is still on the lips of millions. Poets have translated it in different languages; musicians have set it to diverse tunes; martyrs have mounted the gallows singing *Vande Mataram*. The song is a poetic tribute to India, an expression of love, reverence and admiration for India personified as the Divine Mother. The sweet, melodious words of *Vande Mataram* --- 'Mother I Bow to thee' --- have, for generations, roused the patriotism of countless Indians.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji, who wrote this beautiful hymn in praise of India, was one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century. During his lifetime , he earned extraordinary fame as a novelist : so much so that there was invariably a scramble for copies of the magazines in which his novels were serialised. After his death, he came to be regarded as one of the prophets of Indian nationalism. It would be appropriate to quote the assesment of Bankim Chandra made by two outstanding Indians of the twentieth century : Rabindranath Tagore and Shri Aurobindo. Referring to his own literary evolution, Tagore said that the literary revolution brought about by Bankim was one of the formative influences which moulded him. Tagore recalled how Bankim had to face the jealousy and dogmatism of his literary and social adversaries, and how he carried on courageously his "double task of creation and criticism". In another context Tagore praised Bankim as a "true *Karmayogi* in literature". Shri Aurobindo, an ardent admirer of Bankim Chandra, started a journal which he called *Vande Mataram*" It is possible," said Shri Aurobindo," that the literary critic of the future will reckon *Vishavriksha* and other novels as Bankim's artistic masterpieces, giving only qualified praise to his *Anandamath* and *Dharmatattva*. Yet it is the Bankim of these later works and not the Bankim of the creative masterpieces who will rank among the makers

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of modern India. The earlier Bankim was a poet and stylist, the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder".

Whether we incline to Tagore's judgment or to Shri Aurobindo's, Bankim Chandra's deep impact on the thought and culture of modern India is undeniable. To understand his true significance, it is necessary to view his writings in the context of the intellectual and social trends in the middle of the nineteenth century and also keep in mind the work of some of his predecessors . By the turn of the century, British rule had been established firmly. Though there was resentment against political and economic subjugation, regaining of national freedom was a distant dream. It was in the religious and social fields that the new awakening expressed itself; politically, the educated sections had, by and large, reconciled themselves to foreign rule. As Bengal had been subjected to western influences more deeply than other parts of India, it was not surprising that most of the important new movements in social and religious thought should have arisen there .

The establishment of the Brahmo Samaj by Raja Rammohan Roy marked the beginning of what is often described as the 'Renaissance' in Bengal Accepting the best elements in India's spiritual heritage, especially Islamic monotheism and the ethical idealism of the Upanishads, Rammohan adopted a positive,assimilative approach to western liberal thought, and the humanistic aspect of Christianity . He and his followers , Devendranath Tagore and Keshav Chandra Sen, tried to rid religion of superstitions and empty ritual. They also dedicated themselves to education and social reform, working for the cause of widow remarriage and other issues. Besides the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj , the eminent scholar and educationist, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, also worked for social reform.

While the reformers and rationalists pleaded for a discriminating acceptance of the West without losing sight of their Indian heritage there were some intellectuals who were swept off their feet by western values and methods. They held the view that India should begin an entirely new chapter in her history and turn to the superior culture of the West, as Indian religious and social life had become totally stagnant and irrational. Fortunately, the number of such extreme westophiles was small. At the opposite ends, there were some who wanted India to fall back to her past and to reject the alien and materialistic culture of the West. This revivalist trend was represented most effectively by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and members of the Arya Samaj founded by him. Curiously enough, the revivalist trend found support from an unexpected quarter : The Theosophical Society. It was founded by two foreigners who had become disenchanted with the West ---Madame Blavatsky, a Russian emigre', and Colonel Olcott, an American . While the reformers and the revivalists were engaged in their controversies, there was the sage Ramakrishna

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Parmahansa who was quietly generating another current of thought. Rama krishna, and his distinguished disciple Swami Vivekananda, represented the monistic Vedanta Philosophy , which they interpreted as universal religion of love, inward purity, and tolerance for different paths leading to the common goal of spiritual perfection and tranquillity.

Such was the diversified and amazingly rich cultural milieu in which Bankim Chandra Chatterji lived. He was exposed to all the currents and cross-currents of thought and culture mentioned above. Some of the distinguished leaders of these movements were of his own age-group : for instance , Ramakrishna (born in 1836, that is two years before Bankim) and Keshav Chandra Sen (born in 1838 , the year of Bankim's birth). Some were his older contemporaries, for instance Devendranath Tagore (born in 1817) and Dayananda Saraswati (born in 1824); and some, like Swami Vivekananda and the founder of Theosophy, were his younger contemporaries. As between the reformers and the revivalists, Bankim on the whole inclined towards the latter. But he had clear perception of the contribution made by western thought to modern India.

Let us now turn from the socio-religious to the literary background. Although Bankim Chandra is regarded as one of the makers of modern Bengali literature he was aware of his debt to some of his predecessors, both in poetry and in prose. At the time of Bankim's birth, Ishwar Chandra Gupta dominated the poetic scene . His work served as a bridge between medieval and modern Bengali poetry. Bankim himself started his literary career as a poet writing in Ishwar Gupta's style, before he discovered that fiction was his real forte. After Ishwar Gupta (1812 - 1859) came Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873) who introduced new techniques derived from his vast knowledge of English and continental literature.

Meanwhile, Bengali prose was shedding its archaisms and becoming more fluent, more expressive and natural . Before Bankim came to the scene, Pearey Chand Mitra had written the first full-fledged Bengali novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal* ('Favourite Son of an Important Family'). As for nonfiction prose, although Rammohan Roy had already introduced an element of suppleness in Bengali, it is in the writings of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutt that we see the first impressive specimens of Bengali prose. Bankim Chandra himself praised these two stylists, especially Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The first modern orientation of Sanskritised Bengali, he said, came from "These two great scholar-writers. Their prose, though Sanskritic in quality, was not stiff or incomprehensible; especially the language that Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar wrote, which was as sweet as it was charming . As far as I know, no one before Vidyasagar, and none after him, could write such elegant and graceful Bengali prose as he did".

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Thus we can say---without in any way belittling the originality and significance of Bankim Chandra ---that the groundwork had been done for him by distinguished predecessors in socio-religious thought as well as by literateurs who had fashioned the Bengali language into an efficient and versatile tool. Bankim Chandra's own talents found expression in the congenial intellectual and literary atmosphere.

II

Bankim Chandra Chatterji was born on the twenty-sixth of June , 1838, in the village of Kanthalpara which is located near the Naihati railway station. His father,Jadav Chandra Chatterji, started out as a low-ranking government official but rose to be a deputy collector in the very year Bankim was born . While Bankim was still a boy, his father had a serious illness. At one point every one thought that he had died and preparations were made for his cremation. A wandering mendicant who happened to pass that way stopped the cremation and revived Jadav Chandra . This incident must have made a deep impression on Bankim who always showed a deep fascination of *sannyasis.*

Another childhood attraction for Bankim , which persisted in later life , was the beautiful and verdant countryside in which his house was located. There was a large garden with trees and shrubbery, a tank and an orchard. Bankim wandered freely in these idyllic surroundings, among evergreens, flowering shrubs, and animals (not excluding serpents). In some of the descriptions of nature in his novels , these childhood memories have left their imprints. As for the religious life of the Chatterji household Bankim later recalled the zest with which all the traditional rituals were performed and festivals celebrated. The worship of the ancestral deity, Radhavallabh (Krishna as Radha's Beloved), was an important part of the day-to-day religious practices of the family. The influence of the Krishna cult is reflected in Bankim's religious work written towards the end of his life.

Bankim began his education at the Midnapore English School, where his father happened to be posted at the time. Those were the days of early marriages, and Bankim was married at his village-home when he was eleven. Entering the Hooghly college a year later, he showed his precocity by winning an award in a poetry competition at the age of fifteen. A year later he won a government scholarship. Meanwhile, he had already started writing for a journal called *Samvad Prabhakar.* He enjoyed retelling ancient and medieval stories. Some of these were published. Bankim continued his education at the Presidency College, Calcutta, where he obtained the B.A. degree in 1858. He was immediately appointed a Deputy Magistrate and was posted at Jessore. Unfortunately, his wife died the

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following year.

In his official work, Bankim won quick promotions through his competence, integrity and intelligence. He was transferred , for periods ranging from two to five years, to different districts of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal proper. He thus got opportunities of observing the multifaceted life of the Indian people, with its amazing continuity in spite of all the changes that had taken place after the British conquest. During his posting at Khulna, he married again. The name of his second wife was Rajalakshmi Devi. In 1864 he wrote a novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife,* which was serialised in the journal *The Indian Field.* Fortunately, he resisted the temptation of writing in English and turned to his mother tongue. In fact, even while *Rajmohan's Wife* was being serialised, he was quietly working on his first Bengali novel, *Durgesh-Nandini.* This novel was published in 1865 and immediately it took the Bengali reading public by storm. Rabindranath Tagore later described the publication of *Durgesh-Nandini* as the "coming of dawn after a long night".

For fourteen years after the publication of *Durgesh-Nandini* , Bankim Chandra published a novel almost every year. His creative energy seemed to be unlimited. As his major work will be considered in detail in the following sections it would be appropriate to describe briefly his biographical details with the minimum of references to his writings . Bankim passed the Law examination in 1869. The following year his mother died. During the next two years he resumed writing in English, but confined himself to essays on religious and historical subjects. These articles were published in the *Calcutta Review* and *Mukherji's Magazine.*

In 1872 Bankim Chandra started the journal *Bangadarshan.* Many of his novels were first serialised in this journal before being published as books. The appearance of *Bangadarshan* was a landmark in the history of Indian literary journalism. It is remarkable that he should have been able to do so much literary work and yet give his best to his official duties. Bankim earned promotions in the judicial service solely on the basis of his excellent work . His career as a magistrate was a standing refutation of the myth, created by some intolerant British officials, that Indians would not be able to shoulder the responsibilities of high office . In the discharge of his duties, Bankim always upheld his dignity as an Indian and refused to compromise his self-respect. He did not hesitate to contradict, and even strongly criticise, his superiors when he disagreed with them. Biographers of Bankim Chandra have drawn attention to three occasions when Bankim defied highly-placed British officers: his quarrel with Colonel Duffin in 1873, his clash with Collector Buckland in 1881 and a bitter dispute with Collector Westmacott in 1883. Mention should also be made here of his much-publicised controversy with Reverend Hastie, a Christian missionary, who attacked Hindu religious practices without understanding their

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meaning or genesis.

In 1875, after working as a magistrate for seventeen years, Bankim Chandra went on a long vacation. This gave him an opportunity to live quietly in the countryside and give exclusive attention to his literary work. He returned to his official duties a year later and was posted at Hoogly, where he set up his household. *Bangadarshan,* which had ceased publication for over a year, reappeared in 1877 under the editorship of Bankim's brother , Sanjiv Chandra Chatterji. In 1880 Bankim was appointed Personel Secretary to the Commissioner of Burdwan Division. His next two postings were at Howrah and Alipore,and then he was transferred to Orissa. His father died in 1881.

Many honours came to him in the last decade of his life. He was promoted to Class I grade in his service, and was elected a Fellow of the Calcutta University, He was assigned the job of editing the poetical work of Ishwar Chandra Gupta. In 1891, after his retirement from service, he was elected President of the Literary Section of the University Institute In 1892 he was awarded the title of Rai Bahadur, and the following year he got the title of C.I.E.But Bankim had been suffering from diabetes for some time. This disease, coupled with overwork, led to a decline in his health. He died on 5th April , 1894, in Calcutta. Bankim was only fifty-six at the time of his death. The news of his passing away spread rapidly, and hundreds of thousands of his grief-stricken countrymen joined the funeral procession. Two days later, at a public meeting held in the Calcutta Town Hall, glowing tributes were paid to him.

III

Bankim Chandra's literary output was so vast that only some of his works can be considered in this study . Let us first take up his major novels. Although he came to be regarded as a pioneer in writing historical novels, in almost all his works, romantic love, and social and religious issues, have also been introduced. Hardly any of his novels can be called purely historical. Hence instead of approaching his work in terms of historical, religious or social themes ,it would be more convenient to deal with them in the chronological order of their publication.

As already mentioned, *Durgeshnandini* was the first novel that brought him fame, not only in Bengal but in other parts of India as well. An Urdu translation was published from Lucknow in 1876 , only twelve years after the original Bengali. Translations into English , Hindi, Kannada and some other Indian languages were published during the author's lifetime. Incidentally, seven different Hindi translations of this novel have been made. Some of the characters in *Durgeshnandini* are similar to those in Walter Scott's English novel *Ivanhoe.* Some episodes, like duels and

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court intrigues, also show similarities between the two novels. Bankim, however , asserted that he had not read *Ivanhoe* before completing *Durgeshnandini*. The atmosphere and the emotional expression in the two novels are entirely different. The similarities between them are superficial. Critics who said that Bankim had offered an English novel in an Indian garb were utterly unfair to him.

Durgeshnandini was based on a popular legend about the conflict between Mughals and Pathans in the sixteenth century-- a legend which Bankim first heard from his grand-uncle (who lived to the age of a hundred and eight!). Like all popular legends, historical facts are here combined with romantic love stories. Here is an outline of the plot. Raja Birendra Singh had established his own independent principality at Vishnupur in Orissa, where he had built a strong fortress called Garh Mandaran. The Pathans, who had a strong base in Bengal, attacked Vishnupur and captured the fortress. The ousted Raja appealed to Akbar, the Mugal Emperor at Agra , for help. Akbar deputed his general , Man Singh, to dislodge the Pathans. But before the Mughals could defeat the Pathans, Birendra was captured, alongwith his daughter, Tilottama, and Man Singh's son , Jagat Singh. On the orders of Katlu Khan , the Pathan leader Raja Birendra Singh was mudered.

Birendra's long-neglected wife, Vimala, who had remained in the background, now came forward to avenge her busband's death. She succeeded in fatally wounding Katlu Khan . On his death bed, Katlu expressed a desire to make peace with Akbar. Through his prisoner, Jagat Singh he sent a message to the Emperor, offering to surrender to the Mughals if his family were allowed to live honourably in Orissa. Within this political-military framework, the author has introduced a lovetriangle. Jagat Singh fell in love with Tilottama, while Katlu Khan's daughter, Ayesha, was romantically attracted towards Jagat Singh . And Osman, the general in command of Katlu Khan's army , fell in love with Ayesha.

It will be seen from the above summary that Bankim's first major novel was artistically rather weak, with an artificial and unconvincing plot-structure. But it made a deep impression on Bengali readers partly because nothing like it had been written in that language before, and partly because the author had introduced colloquial expressions side -by- side highly sanskritised words. His next novel *Kapalakundala,* published only a year later , is quite different, in style as well as subject matter. This novel , too, is placed in the reign of Akbar . But the historical element is very superficial. On the contrary, there is an element of the weird and the mysterious which was absent in the earlier work . There are poetic descriptions of natural phenomena, particularly the sea and the forest.

Kapalakundala, the heroine of this novel, was an innocent, young girl, like Shakespeare's Miranda or Kalidasa's Shakuntala. She was brought

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up by a *Kapalik,* a Tantric hermit, who was engaged in performing strange magical rites, including human sacrifices. A young man named Navakumar, abandoned by his companions during a journey to the pilgrimage of Ganga sagar, lost his way in the wilderness and ultimately came to the *Kapalik's* hut. *Kapalik* hypnotized him and led to him to the bank of a river with the intention of offering him as a sacrifice to the goddess. Navakumar escaped with the help of Kapalakundala and the two were married by a Brahmin priest. Navakumar returned home with his bride.

Kapalakundala, however, did not find it easy to adjust to the conventions and customs of village life. She had grown up in natural surroundings She soon began to pine for the freedom of open spaces. At the same time she did not wish to return to Kapalik. While she was in this state of uncertainty, an enexpected development took place. Navakumar's former wife, whom he had left because her parents had adopted Islam, turned up in the village. This lady, whose name was Lutfunnisa, tried to alienate Navakumar from Kapalakundala. In her longing to win back her husband she poisoned Navakumar's ears and ultimately succeded in making him doubt Kapalakundala's chastity.

Meanwhile the *Kapalik,* incensed at being deprived of his victim, was looking for Navakumar. He managed to reach the village, determined to sacrifice Kapalakundala herself, since she had betrayed him and helped Navakumar to escape. Under the influence of some narcotic drugs administred by the *Kapalik,* Navakumar led Kapalakundala to the bank of the Ganga for a purificatory bath before sacrificie. But when the two of them were at the river bank, Navakumar's love for her predominated and he regretted his action. Kapalakundala convinced him that she had never been unfaithful and his suspicions were unfounded. She, however, refused to accompany him back to the village. While he was trying to persuade her to return, a freak rain storm suddenly swept Kapalakundala into the swirling waves of the Ganga. Grief-stricken and full of remorse, Navakumar jumped into the river and joined Kapalakundala in death.

Although *Kapalakundala* did not prove to be a literary sensation, it evoked considerable interest. The mystical streak in Bankim Chandra found expression in the character of the kapalik, with his strange and esoteric rites. It was modelled after an actual Sannyasi who lived in a forest near Midnapore, where Bankim was posted when he wrote this novel . This Sannyasi belonged to a Tantric cult and Bankim met him several times. The historical element has been introduced by placing the story in the sixteenth century and by connecting Lutfunnisa to the Mughal court. Kapalakundala was translated into English ten years after the Bengali original was published. The English version was serialised in the *National Magazine.*

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Bankim Chandra's next novel, *Mrinalini,* which was published in 1869, shows a temporary decline in his creative power. The structure of the story is slipshod and the style uneven . The importance of *Mrinalini* lies in the fact that here we see in an incipient form the theme of national liberation which was later developed in *Anandamath.* The historical element is predominant in this novel, which is based on the alleged conquest of Bengal by a small band of only seventeen Muslim horsemen led by Muhammed-bin-Bakhtiar Khilji. Madhavacharya, the guru of Hemachandra, prince of Magadha, called upon his disciple to fight for the liberation of his own kingdom from the Pathans and then saving the neighbouring kingdom of Bengal from their aggressive designs. Hemachandra, though he was courageous and patriotic, could not act effectively because of his infatuation for Mrinalini, a lovely lady who had cast her spell upon him. Madharacharya tried in vain to free Hemachandra from her influence. Meanwhile treachery was afoot in the kingdom of Bengal. The cunning minister, Pashupati, betrayed him and with his help the Pathans were able to conquer the kingdom through a swift and bold military assault. Madhavacharya had failed in his mission, but he had pointed his finger to future struggles for the attainment of freedom from foreign subjugation.

There was a gap of four years between *Mrinalini* and *Vishavriksha* ('Poison Tree') published in 1873. This was the first social novel of Bankim chandra can and does not have any reference to historical events. Here we see the author turning his attention to one of the important issues of the day: the question of widow remarriage. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other reformers had raised their voices against the pitiable lot of young Hindu widows and had started a movement in support of widow remarriage. *Vishavriksha* is the story of an elderly person's infatuation with a young widow . Here is a brief summary:

A young orphan girl, Kundanandini , was adopted by a rich *zemindar,* Nagendra Datta. His wife, Suryamukhi, looked after the girl with great affection and arranged her marriage with Tarachand, a young man she had known for many years . Suryamaukhi regarded Tarachand almost as a brother and felt sure that Kundanandini would be happy with him Unfortunately, Tarachand died suddenly soon after the marriage Kundanandini returned to the zemindar's house and started living there again . In course of time Nagendra became attracted towards the young, lively, attractive girl whom destiny had brought into his home. The attraction turned into infatuation and he married her . His devoted first wife left the house and went away.

It was not long before Nagendra was stricken with remorse. He went out in search of Suryamukhi but was unable to find her and came back in a state of deep dejection. However, after some time Suryamukhi,

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who had never ceased to love her husband in spite of his passion for Kundanandini, returned. There was a happy reunion between the two. Kundanandini, ashamed of having caused so much turmoil in the family of her benefactors, committed suicide. *Vishavriksha* was seen by many readers as Bankim's disapproval of widow remarriage. But Kundanandini's tragedy was not the result of her decision to remarry; had her second husband been a man of her own age-group, and had he been a bachelor or a widower, she might have been happy. She suffered because she married a much older man who already had a wife . The failure of Kundanandini's marriage cannot therefore be taken as a warning against widow remarriage in general.

Let us now consider the next two important novels by Bankim Chandra, *Chandrashekhar* and *Krishnakanter Will*, skipping over his novelettes for which we cannot find space in this paper. *Chandrashekhar* was serialised in the journal *Bangadarshan* and published in 1875. Here we we have a romantic story set in the historical context of the conflict between the British authorities and Mir Kasim, the Nawab of Bengal.

In spite of the title, Chandrashekhar's character in this novel is overshadowed by that of Shaivalini. Although she was deeply attracted towards a young man named Pratap, circumstances compelled Shavalini to marry Chandrashekhar, a well-to-do man much older than her. He was a good man ---noble, kind, tolerant, but devoid of any romantic feelings who failed to understand the frustration of his young wife. Shaivalini continued to meet Pratap after her marriage. Although their relationship was purely platonic, there was a guiltfeeling on each side. Shaivalini made sincere but unsuccessful attempts to discipline herself and root out her love for Pratap. Ultimately, Pratap was convinced that so long as he was alive he would never cease to long for his company. He therefore made the supreme sacrfice and terminated his own life.

Krishnakanter Will was written when the author was on a long vacation from his official duties, though it was published two years later. In this novel Bankim reverts to the theme of widow remarriage; and again we see that the widow fails to secure happiness through a liaison with a married man. Here is an outline of the story, Krishnakant, a rich zemindar, treated his nephew, Govindlal, as his son, since he did not have any children of his own . Govind was married to Bhramar. It was a happy marriage, until Govind fell in love with Rohini , a young widow . Krishnakant, distressed by this indiscretion, drew up a will, leaving all his property to Govind's wife, Bhramar . Soon after that, he died, Govindlal left his uncle's house and started living with Rohini in the village of Prasadpur. Bhramar was heartbroken, and pined for her husband even though he had been unfaithful. Her father decided to avenge the wrong done to his daughter. He prevailed upon one of his friends to go to Prasadpur and pose

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as Rohini's lover. This friend, Nishakar, agreed to the scheme. He maneuvered in such a way that Govindlal saw Rohini meeting him near a tank outside the village. Incensed and jealous , Govindlal shot and killed Rohini. However, through the influence of his father-in -law he somehow escaped conviction . He returned home to meet his wife . But Bhramar was on her deathbed. Thus the novel ends in a double tragedy.

At this point we can take up *Rajasimha* which was first published in 1882, though an enlarged and revised version appeared several years later. Bankim himself regarded *Rajasimha* as the only novel written by him which can be truly called historical. This estimate is correct in the sense that, though not always accurate, it is closer to historical facts than any of his other novels. Princess Chanchal Kumari of Rupnagar saw a picture of Prince Rajasimha of Udaipur, and fell in love with him. Preoccpied with thoughts of her hero Chanchal Kumari, in a careless moment, kicked a portrait of Aurangzeb, the archenemy of Rajputs. The incident was reported to Emperor Aurangzeb by his spies. To avenge the insult, Aurangzeb sent an army against Rupnagar. The Princess sent an urgent message to Rajasimha appealing for help. Rajasimha responded and war broke out between the Mughals and the Rajputs.

The novel is full of thrilling episodes, particularly one in which the Mughal army was trapped in a mountain pass and suffered heavy losses. Although Rajasimha emerges as the hero, and the Mughals are portrayed as aggressors, there are some noble and brave characters on the Mughal side as well. Mubarak, a Mughal general, is depicted as chivalrous and courageous. The character of Aurangzeb's daughter, Zebunnisa, is drawn in a vivid and sympathetic manner. In the epilogue to this novel the author says : "It does not matter whether a person is a Hindu or a Muslim. If his character is dominated by *dharma*, he is a superior person. If he lacks *dharma,* he is inferior." To describe *Rajasimha* as an antiMuslim novel ' is thus manifestly wrong. When a small kingdom defends its freedom and resists a mighty empire, its leader extracts admiration irrespective of the religion he professes. *Rajasimha* symbolizes heroic struggle against tyranny, but not against adherents of Islam.

IV

We now turn to the last three full-fledged novels written by Bankim Chandra : *Anandamath, Devi Chaudhurani* and *Sitaram*, published between 1882 and 1887. In all these three the historical context has been treated flexibly. And all three convey the message of patriotism and social justice. In this section it seems appropriate to set aside the choronological order of publication and consider *Anandamath*, the most influential of the three, at the end. Let us first take up *Devi Chaudhurani*, published

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in 1884. The author regarded it as one of his important works and started translating it into English. But the translation was never completed.

Devi Chaudhurani is avowedly a novel with a purpose, and vital ethical issues are raised in it. Haraballabh, an affluent zemindar, had a son named Brajeshwar. The zemindar arranged his son's marriage with Praphulla, the lovely daughter of a poor widow. Later, however, giving credence to some unsavoury gossip about the widow, he asked his daughter-in-law to leave. Brajeshwar loved Praphulla but did not have the courage to defy his father. Praphulla and her mother left the home, penniless and helpless. The widow died a few months later. Praphulla was kidnapped by a band of ruffians, but she escaped from their clutches. While she was wandering in the forest, she met an old man who had just found a buried treasure. The old man was mortally ill. Before he died, he handed over the treasure to the girl.

Praphulla was now a rich woman. But another turning point in her life was to come very soon. She met a man named Bhawani Pathak who had adopted the life of a bandit in order to rob the rich and help the poor; a kind of Indian Robin Hood. Impressed by his ideals, Praphulla joined Pathak and his band though she had reservations about his methods. Under his guidance she led a disciplined life, practised Yoga, and acquired military training. Pathak claimed that he believed in nonattached action as preached in the *Bhagavadgita*. He proclaimed her to be a queen - a just queen who punished the oppressors and protected the poor. So Praphulla, the daughter of an indigent widow, was transformed into Devi Chaudhurani, queen of the righteous bandits.

Pathak now continued his work in the name of Devi Chaudhurani who was protected by an armed guard. Those were chaotic times. The authority of the Muslim rulers was dwindling rapidly, while the British were steadily strengthening their grip over India. There were frequent clashes between the Muslims and the British, while the peasants were caught in the middle and suffered at the hands of both the parties. In these anarchic conditions, the people hailed Devi Chaudhurani as their protector. Her followers collected money by raiding treasure-wagons, and distributed it among the poor. The British made frantic efforts to capture Devi Chaudhurani, but she eluded them.

One day Devi Chaudhurani's men happened to attack a boat in which her husband, Brajeshwar, who had rejected her five years earlier, was travelling. Learning that her father-in-law was in deep financial trouble, she gave fifty-thousand ruppes to her husband as a loan. But her father-in-law, Haraballabh, repaid her generosity by betraying her.He disclosed her whereabouts to Lieutenant Brennan, who was in charge of the British soldiers in search of Devi Chaudhurani. However, the chance meeting with her husband had brought about a change in her thinking. Devi

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Chadurani had become tired of her role as a bandit-queen. She longed to become a housewife. At her request, Bhawani Pathak released her from the responsibilities which she was bearing as the leader of the group.

By a strange irony of fortune, instead of Devi Chaudhurani being captured by the British, Brennan and Haraballabh, fell into the hands of Devi Chaudhurani's men when their boat was overtaken by a storm. Devi released them and returned to the village home which she had been forced to leave. Devi Chaudhurani, the bandit queen, was retransformed into Praphulla, the simple housewife. She found peace and joy in her daily chores and in selfless service of the rural community. Some time later, Bhawani Pathak also realized that it was wrong to follow the path of violence even with the purpose of helping the poor.

Sitaram, published in 1887, is also a novel with a purpose. In *Devi Chaudhurani*, we see that a transition from a violent life to a harmonious life was made possible because of the inner strength acquired by the queen and her preceptor through years of discipline and self-restraint. In *Sitaram*, we see that lack of discipline and restraint leads to moral decline and ruination. The story is placed in the districts of Khulna and Jessore which are now in Bangladesh. The historical setting is the conflict between the authority of the Mughal Emperor at Delhi and that of the Nawab of Bengal, in the eighteenth century.

Sitaram Ray, a wealthy zemindar, built for himself a township which he named Muhammadpur. Here he lived in the grand style of a landed aristocrat. So powerful did he become that officers of the Mughal Emperor asked him to collect revenues from other princes in that region and forward it to Delhi. Sitaram occupied the territories of some of the princes and then refused to pay revenue to the Nawab of Bengal who had legal jurisdiction over his estates. Sitaram justified his actions on the ground that he was trying to topple the Nawab's oppressive regime and establish a just state based on ancient religious ideals. The Nawab attacked him but was defeated and killed.

Sitaram was now at the height of his power and affluence. But his personal life was unhappy. His wife, Shri, had kept away from him because an astrologer had predicted that she would bring about the death of some one very dear to her. She loved Sitaram deeply, but refused to lead a conjugal life with him because of the prediction. The more she resisted him, the more he desired her. To save him from his infatuation, Shri left Muhammadpur and started leading a life of religious devotion and worship.

The new Nawab of Bengal, hearing that Sitaram had been neglecting affairs of state because of his infatuation for Shri, attacked Muhammadpur. Shri was informed of this, and she came back to remain with her husband in his hour of danger. Sitaram, however, had lost all his willpower. He led a life of ease and indulgence, doting on Shri. At great

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expense he built a new house for her and would not let her out of his sight even for an hour. The treasury was depleted. The soldiers could not be paid. There was resentment among the people. Shri again slipped out.When he discovered that Shri had finally left him, he became tyrannical and cruel. The Nawab's forces attacked and captured Muhammadpur. Sitaram, disgraced and powerless, somehow managed to escape. A strong and heroic man, who once had the vision of an ideal state, had thus been laid low by his own blind passion.

We conclude this survey of Bankim Chandra's contributions to Indian fiction with a discussion of his most influential novel, *Anandamath*. This is one of those rare novels which appeal to the sentiments of millions of people in a manner scarcely anticipated by the authors themselves. The literary impact of *Anandamath* was negligible. It is a strange medley of history, politics, ethics, enlivened with romance and adventure. Nor is its message particularly lucid. And yet it foreshadowed with remarkable precision the patriotic upheaval that was to liberate India from foreign rule less than seven decades after it was written. And it bequeathed to future generations, through the immortal song *Vande Mataram*, a tremendously powerful concept: the adoration of the motherland as the symbol of the Divine Mother, the symbol of God himself in his feminine aspect, the ultimate source of energy and value.

The story of *Anandamath* is complicated and loosely structured. Only a brief summary can be attempted here. The village of Padachihna was devastated by a terrible famine caused by prolonged drought. Mahendra Singh, a zemindar of this village, became impoverished during the famine, set out in search of food, accompanied by his wife, Kalyani. During their wanderings, Kalyani was captured by dacoits. She, however, managed to escape. As she was walking in the forest, she met a hermit named Satyanand who led her to his *ashrama*. The name of this *ashrama* was Anandamath, ('Hermitage of Joy'). Satyananda was the head of a group of ascetics who called themselves *santan* that is 'children' of the motherland. Satyananda sent his assistant, Bhavananda, to find Mahendra and bring him to the hermitage.

Bhavananda, after a long search, found Mahendra. But both of them were captured by British soldiers who were carrying the revenue collected by the East India Company from the farmers. As Bhavananda did not return, Satyananda sent a rescue party of sannyasis led by another of his disciples, Jivananda. The sannyasis made a surprise attack on the British soldiers, killed their commander, and looted the revenue. Mahendra was shocked by the violence and looting. To his surprise, Bhavananda responded by singing the first line of a song : *Vande Mataram*, Mother I bow to thee. Mahendra asked : "Who is this mother you are praising?". Bhavananda then sang two stanzas of the song :

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Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.

Glory of moonlight dreams
Over thy branches and lordly streams,
Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!
Mother, I kiss feet,
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.

"This is our Mother", Bhavananda said as he concluded his chant. "This Mother is our Motherland, the sole object of our worship. We have no other ties". Mahendra was astounded to see tears streaming down the eyes of that stern ascetic who had just participated in a bloody attack on a group of soldiers, and pillaged their possessions. Bhavananda justified his actions on the ground that the Nawab had no right to collect revenue for the British from people for whom he could not provide any security. Bhavananda led Mahendra to Anandamath, where Swami Satyananda welcomed him cordially. Mahendra was taken round the *ashrama* and shown the different forms in which the Divine Mother was visualized. In one of the rooms he was an image of the Mother as *Jagaddhatri*, Protectress of the World : smiling, reposeful, richly adorned with jewels. "This is the Mother as she was", said Satyananda. Then in a mysterious subterranean passage Mahendra saw the Mother "as she is now" : gloomy, stripped of all her jewels, wearing a garland of skulls around her neck. They all bowed before this image of Kali and said in a respectful tone : *Vande Mataram*. Finally, through another passage, they ascended a marble pavillion. There Mahendra saw the Divine Mother "as she will be" : Gracious, beneficent, surrounded by Ganesh, Karttikeya, Sarasvati and Lakshmi. To the sannyasis, these three forms of the Divine Goddess were the three aspects of their own adorable Motherland.

Satyananda initiated Mahendra into the order of the *santans*. He made the stern vow of renouncing all worldy pleasures and rejecting the barriers of caste and family attachments. Shortly after his admission to the *ashrama*, there were new clashes between the sannyasis and the British. In a battle, the British were defeated and many of their officers were killed. Swami Satyananda now entertained the ambition of carving out a new, independent Hindu state. His ideas, however, received a check when

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a doctor arrived from Calcutta and gained the attention of the sannyasis. The doctor asserted that violence and looting are fundamentally wrong and must be abandoned. The time for an independent state, he said, had not yet come. The British had brought the benefits of education and science. No religion can succeed without knowledge, and English education was bringing knowledge to illiterate people. It was therefore wise to let the British rule in peace for the time being. Let Indians acquire as much knowledge as they can so that with the help of this knowledge political freedom may be eventually attained by a future generation.

The entire novel is permeated by a spirit of self-sacrifice in the cause of the country, in which the inner strength of even ordinary people is expressed. Without going into the details of the story, two episodes may be mentioned here. Jivananda, one of the lieutenants of Satyananda, had left his wife, Shanti, in the village before going to the battle against the British. This simple Indian housewife was fired by patriotism and came to Anandamath, dressed as a man. She remained true to the ideal of Indian womanhood in her dedication to her husband. But she abandoned the shyness and diffidence which is typical of a delicate Indian wife and was transformed into a fighter. Bhavananda, another disciple of Satyananda, made improper advances to Mahendra's wife, Kalyani. She repulsed him indignantly. He felt ashamed, and atoned for his sinful thoughts by sacrificing his life in the country's cause.

We can now make a critical assessment of the entire range of Bankim Chandra's fiction. The defects of his novels are so glaring that even an admirer of Bankim cannot overlook them. His treatment of the historical context is often slipshod. One need not expect strict adherence to historical facts because, as he himself once said in reply to a critic, "a novel is a novel, not a history book". Nevertheless, a historical novelist is expected to make a thorough study of the period in which he places his story. Bankim does not seem to have done this. Apart from factual errors, he does not convey even the spirit and flavour of Mughal or Rajput history. In some of his novels, the historical and the romantic aspects are very poorly integrated; the romantic subplot seems to have hardly any connection with the clash of political forces. Bankim's style is often rhetorical and mawkish. Many of his characters appear crude and unconvincing—bandit queens and other lovely women with daggers, miltant ascetics, swashbuckling heroes who fight duels and perform impossible feats. Moreover, chance and fortuitous events are sometimes brought into Bankim's novels to provide solutions which might otherwise have been difficult. To mention only one example, a cyclonic storm suddenly sweeps Kapalakundala into the swirling river at a crucial moment when she was unable to decide whether or not she should return home with her husband.

But when all these limitations are conceded, Bankim still emerges

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from his creative work as a pioneer in a literary genre which held immense possibilities for the future. Though Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and some others had laid the foundations of a modern prose style, it was Bankim who first demonstrated the effectiveness of this style in fiction. In the words of a historian of Bengali literature, "Bankim's defects were the birth pangs of the Bengali novel". He introduced the techniques of the English novel into India while remaining firmly rooted to his national tradition. His imagination ranged over a wide field and in his novels he has touched upon every important aspect of Indian life political, social, economic, religious, even educational. Bankim did not write for superficial entertainment. His novels are marked by sincerity of purpose. Even those who disagree with his ideas must recognise that Bankim, through his novels, kindled patriotic fervour in the hearts of thousands of readers. We get in his works not only glimpses of the life and culture of India but also of the variety and beauty of the landscape, flora and fauna with which nature has so lavishly endowed this country. Bankim Chandra's sensitiveness to the beauty and peace of nature can be seen in many wonderful passages, particularly those in which he describes the forest, the sea and the river.

V

Bankim Chandra's nonfictional writings are so voluminous that one is amazed at the sheer quantity of his output considering that he had a comparatively brief life span of fiftysix years. His English essays alone, published in various journals, would fill a large volume. His Bengali writings, besides novels, comprise of literary and critical essays, reviews, personal essays and memoirs, sketches, fantasies, humorous and satirical pieces, and serious essays on religious, social, historical and cultural subjects. We will consider here two of his important studies in religion —— *Dharmatattva* and *Krishnacharitra* ——and some sections of his humorous and satirical writings from *Kamalakanter Daptar* and *Lokrahasya*.

In the last decade of his life Bankim Chandra became increasingly interested in religion. *Dharmatattva* ('Principles of Religion') was published in 1891. We find in this book the influence of western utilitariarn and positivist thought. Since early youth he had been attracted by the practical and rationalist outlook of western thought as represented by Mill, Bentham, Comte, and Spencer. In *Dharmatattva* he tried to show that Positivism and Rationalism are fully consistent with the theistic, devotional trends in Hinduism. *Dharma*, he said, was nothing but the harmonious development of all human faculties, culminating in devotion to God. "Whatever protects and sustains man, and promotes his welfare and happiness, is *Dharma*". In putting forward this humanistic definition of

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Dharma Bankim Chandra assumed that the individual and the social functions of Dharma are inseparable. The social awareness, the realism and the rationalist outlook of the West must be combined with the Indian emphasis on devotion and love. Bankim writes : "I accept the worship of a personal God as the highest perfection in religion. Through a personal God alone can we realize in its ideal form our visions of the True, the Good and the Beautiful". The religion which Bankim expounds in *Dharmatattva* is based on *values*, especially ethical values. Theological doctrines, ritual and ceremony, and philosophical abstractions — all these are regarded as secondary.

Bankim Chandra's *Krishnacharitra*, first published in 1886, has been regarded as one of the most influential books on the Krishna cult in the modern age. Combining Indian with western scholarship, and making use of all the archaeological and historical evidence that was available in his day, Bankim tried to show Krishna as an actual historical person. It has been said that Bankim did to the Krishna legend what Ernest Renan did to the legend of Jesus Christ. He rid it of fanciful, purely imaginary material and established it as a credible, inspiring account. The erotic and the miraculous elements of Krishna mythology are set aside. Krishna is seen as the most perfect embodiment of the highest human qualities, absolutely free from any blemish or limitation. He becomes an object of worship and adoration because of his perfections; he becomes a Divine Person.

Lok Rahasya is a collection of satirical pieces in which the main targets are the Indians who imitate the West and the westerner talking and writing about India in a superficial and ignorant manner. For instance in *Ramayaner Samalochana* ('Critique of the Ramayana'), we see a western 'Indologist' completely misrepresenting the basic ideas of Hinduism, not through hostility but simply through lack of comprehension. In another piece, a petty Indian official addresses a hymn to the English. In this hymn, he makes a solemn promise to wear trousers and jacket, and to eat with knife and fork, if only his kind hearted English superiors would bestow upon him the favour of a promotion. In yet another caustic fling, an Indian gentleman greets a monkey in English. But the monkey does not appreciate his gesture. On the contrary he punishes the man's snobbishness by catching his neck with his tail.

Kamalakanter Daptar ('Journals of Kamalakanta') was published in 1875. Later, Bankim published a sequel entitled *Kamalakanter Patra* ('Letters of Kamalakanta'). Both are delightful works, containing musings and thoughts written in a variety of moods, serious and light hearted. They are full of humour, irony and insightful observations. Kamalakanta was an out-and-out idler. A local zemindar, Nasiram Babu, gave him a meagre allowance, while a milk-woman named Prasanna supplied him free milk. Kamalakanta was addicted to opium. Under the influence of opium his

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imagination soared to ethereal regions. When he emerged from his fantasy, he jotted down his thoughts and fancies. He wandered in the streets carrying all his wordly possessions : his *daptar*, the bundle of papers containing the record of his day dreams. Here is a specimen of Kamalakanta's musings.

The zemindar was annoyed because thousands of moths hovered around the lamps in his drawing room at night. He had a glass enclosure made to keep the moths away from the flame. Kamalakanta, in one of his opium-induced fantasies, heard the moths complain bitterly that their right to burn themselves in the flame was being infringed upon by the zemindar. As he pondered over the complaint of the moths, Kamalakanta reflected that human beings, too, are like moths. They long to burn themselves in the flames of desires and passions; and if an attempt is made to stop them, they become resentful.

Here is another episode, this time taken from one of the letters which Kamalakanta is said to have written to the editor of Bankim Chandra's journal, *Bangadarshan*. In this episode we see the politics of 'might is right'. In the house of Shibu, the oil merchant, came a hungry dog, lean and emaciated. The poor creature moaned and begged for a few crumbs of food from the plate of a boy who was eating rice. The housewife came thundering into the room and drove the dog away after giving him a sound beating. A few moments later, a hefty bull entered the compound and started eating the fodder while a calf looked on helplessly. The housewife tried to coax the bull but he gave her a fierce look and scared her into beating a hasty retreat!

We will conclude our selections from *Kamalakanta* with a satire on justice. While Kamalakanta was dozing after a liberal helping of opium, a cat came and lapped up the milk which Prasanna the milk-woman had provided. kamalakanta began to fantasize. He imagined that the cat was charged with the theft of milk and produced before a judge for trial. And the cat's defence was along these lines : "In the first place, neither Kamalakanta nor Prasanna was the rightful owner of the milk. It belonged to Mangala, the cow, who was forced to yield it. If anyone has the right to sue me, it is Mangala. Secondly, I lapped up the milk because pangs of hunger drove me to do so. Hunger is invariably the reason for theft. Let the judge punish me. But before that let him fast for three days and see for himself whether or not hunger leads to thoughts of stealing food. If, after three days of fasting, he can still say that his mind did not waver, let him by all means pass the sentence against me.

VI

We have thus far looked at Bankim Chandra Chatterji as a literary

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artist. We saw that, in spite of many limitations, he brought about a revolution in Bengali literature, introduced a new prose style and a new, modern approach to fiction. When we consider him in the role of a thinker, we again see the same situation. In some ways his ideas seem retrograde; and yet his vision of national freedom had a deep influence on the nationalist movement.

Sometimes one is tempted to draw a sharp line of division between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' thinkers. Some historians of modern India have tried to present a contrast between progressives and reformers like Rammohan Roy and Keshav Chandra Sen, and 'revivalists' and 'reactionaries' like Bankim Chandra and Dayananda Saraswati Such generalizations can be misleading. Although they were revivalists in the sense that they derived their inspiration from the ancient Hindu scriptures, Dayananda and Bankim also expressed ideas which were considered revolutionary in their age.

To make a fair assessment of Bankim's role as a thinker, a few specific questions can be asked. Was his attitude towards modern western influences negative, and did he glorify uncritically everything that ancient India has bequeathed? Was he a defender of the *status quo* in social affairs, and did he oppose social reforms? Was he communal and anti-Muslim in his outlook on Indian history? The first question can be answered quite easily. It was simply not possible for anyone of Bankim's intellectual calibre to reject the West entirely. As already mentioned, he was deeply influenced by western rationalism, utilitarianism and positivism and of course English literature, particularly essay, biography and fiction. On many points he conceded that India had much to learn from the West. For instance, he asserted that the very concept of patriotism was something which the west had evolved. He believed strongly that, in evaluating religion, the rational and historical outlook of the west should be combined with devotion and faith. His caricatures of western ways were aimed only at those Indians who had lost their moorings and whose imitation of the west was part of their flattery of western rulers.

On the question of social reform, it must be admitted that Bankim was, on the whole, cautious, even half-hearted in endorsing measures which involved a radical departure from old conventions. While Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and his fellow reformers were waging a struggle against orthodoxy and trying to eradicate social evils like child marriage and the oppression of widows, Bankim was extremely reluctant to support legal measures to ban child marriage and permit widow remarriage. Nor did he raise his voice against the inequities of the caste system. It may seem surprising that Bankim, so much ahead of his time in the literary field, and so radical in his political visions, should take up retrograde position on questions of social reform. However, it is not altogether unusual for social

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conservatism to go hand in hand with forward looking approaches in other spheres. A generation after Bankim Chandra, Lokamanya Tilak also expressed extremely radical views in politics while leaning towards Brahmanical orthodoxy on other issues.

From Bankim Chandra's novels and religious writings some people gathered the impression that he was against Islam and thought in terms of a 'Hindu India'. A careful reading of his works does not bear out this charge. He undoubtedly derived inspiration from Hinduism. He does not seem to have gone deeply into other faiths. Rammohan Roy was steeped in Islamic theology. Keshav Chandra had a profound knowledge of Christian history and doctrine. Unlike them, Bankim Chandra was satisfied with his Hindu heritage. But nowhere has he written anything disrespectful of Islam. His references to some of the enlightened Muslim kings – particularly Akbar – are appreciative. In some of his novels Muslim characters emerge in a more favourable light than Hindu characters. Muslim saints and *fakirs* are referred to in respectful terms. To glorify the heroism of Rajput or Maratha leaders against decadent Muslim rulers cannot be taken as hostility towards Muslims.

In conclusion, it would be appropriate to re-emphasize those features of Bankim Chandra's art and thought which made him such an important figure in the history of India in the nineteenth century. One of the things that we notice markedly in his novels and essays is his closeness to the actual life of the common people in the villages. At a time when most writers confined their attention to the upper classes, Bankim introduced in his novels peasants both Hindu and Muslim wandering singers, artisans, and many other people representing rural India. Although his heroes and heroines are drawn from the upper classes and the aristocracy, they are shown in intimate contact with ordinary people. In his political novels Bankim shows at least a vague awareness of the fact that the struggle for freedom must draw into its orbit the masses in the countryside and should not remain limited to city intellectuals.

Bankim was among the first influential writers in modern times to think in terms of India as a whole. His interest was not limited to Bengal. He draws his characters from, and places his actions in, other parts of India, such as Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab. The Mother who symbolizes India is the common mother of all Indians, wherever they may live and to whichever creed or social class they may belong.

Yet another point that we notice in Bankim's writings is his strong faith in education as the key to national progress and eventually national freedom. His emphasis on education was part of his rationalist-humanist outlook. Introduction of modern education was, in his view, one of the positive features of British rule in India. Bankim felt that the removal of

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social ills was possible only through education. On this point he differed from reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. On questions such as abolition of polygamy and child-marriage, the reformers had a two-fold approach. In the first place, they appealed to *Dharmashastras* and tried to show that the scriptures did not support these customs which were later accretions. Secondly, they said that the State must step in and enact laws which would make such practices illegal. Bankim Chandra felt that an appeal to ancient texts would not be effective against customs and institutions based on *lokachara* (popular conventions). Nor was government interference the answer. Only through education could people be persuaded to re-examine and ultimately reject beliefs and practices that are irrational and unjust. Incidentally, Bankim was one of the first to realize that only the mother-tongue can be a natural medium of instruction at lower levels of education.

Above all, Bankim's writings are permeated by a spirit of patriotism which no other writer before him had been able to express as effectively as he did. His intense love for India comes out through everything he wrote. At a time when the country was politically subjugated and economically undeveloped. Bankim retained his faith in the latent power of the Indian spirit. Through his immortal song, *Vande Mataram* and through the examples of heroism and self-sacrifice which he portrayed in his novels. Bankim Chandra tried to kindle among his countrymen a sense of pride in their country, a sense of self-confidence and dignity. Two decades later, Swami Vivekananda also exhorted Indians to realize the immense latent strength of their motherland, to have faith in her future. These two great Indians of the nineteenth century, Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterji, brought the vital message of vigorous, positive thinking and dynamic action. Swami Vivekananda did this through his speeches and discourses, Bankim through his powerful pen. They prepared the psychological background for that epic struggle which India was destined to wage a generation later.

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Music as a Mode of Transcendence

G.N.S. Raghavan

Balanced living, rather than withdrawal from life-in-the world, was commended by the seers of ancient India. Of the four stages in the round of life, the second, that of the Grihasta or householder was rated the highest (the first being *Brahmacharya* or celibate studentship; the third, *Vanaprasta* or a retired, contemplative life in the forest; and finally *Sanyasa* or the wandering ascetic's renunciation of the world). According to Manu who, a few centuries before the Christian era, codified the beliefs and customs prevalent in India, the reason was that "men of all the three other orders are daily supported by the householder with gifts and food."

The pursuit of pleasure and of profit is a legitimate part of balanced living. But his pursuit must be governed by Dharma or ethics if one is to achieve the highest good, namely *Moksha* or liberation.

A widely prevalent understanding of the term *Moksha* is release from the transmigratory cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It is based on the belief that all forms of life, from lowly creatures to human beings, are the consequence of Karma, or the effect of actions, in previous existence. Metaphorically understood, however, the release denoted by *Moksha* is release from the sense of discrete identity and ego, a liberation from time into eternity.

The ego-bound self sees itself as separate and often feels alienated from and antagonistic to the rest of humankind and of the cosmos. In contrast, the liberated one proclaims *'Aham Brahmosmi'* ('I am Brahman'), affirming his oneness with infinite space and eternal time. The Yaittriya Upanishad says that Brahman is "that from which all beings are born, that by which those born subsist, and that in which those dying enter."

Moksha or transcendence may be experienced and achieved by all. It is the rising beyond self that occurs in total absorption, be it in work or play or art —— in tending a garden, in the enjoyment of music, in climbing a mountain or even in sexual congress. With the shedding of the sense of separate individuality there is a jumping out of linear into vertical time,

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a plumbing of the depths and scaling of the heights of being, in contrast to immortality understood prosaically as an endurance in linear time - which could be a sore punishment.

Soon, however, with most of us, there is a return to *Ahambhava* or the proud sense of separate ego, a relapse and rebirth from eternity into time, or what Keats describes as "the journey back to habitual self." In contrast, the *Sthitha Pragnya*,, the one with steady awareness, also described as a *Jeevanmukta* (one who is liberated even while living) or as *Jnani* (Knower), lives almost uninterruptedly in the bliss of eternal time. This is *Jeevanmoksha*, in contrast to the automatic release from the pains of ego-bound existence, through physical death, that comes assuredly and unavoidably to all.

II

According to the Indian tradition, there are three paths to *Moksha*: the way of *Karma* or deeds; the way of *Jnana* or knowledge; and the way of *Bhakti* or devotion. And music is an acknowledged and widely popular aid *to Bhakti*.

The three modes of spiritual liberation are not mutually exclusive. Sankara, the 8th-century philosopher, was an exponent of *Advaita* or non-dualism (*'Aham Brahmosmi'*) but he was also, paradoxically in Zen fashion, the composer of some of the most moving devotional verses in adoration of God, in the manner of the *Dvaitins* (believers in the dualism of divinity and of humankind).

Part of the explanation of the close association of music with devotion, the fusion of aesthetics and ethics, might lie in the acknowledgement in India of femininity, associated with the graces and the arts of living, as part of divinity. One of the ways in which the All-encompassing Being is depicted is as *Ardhanariswara*, half-male and half-female. This androgynous concept of God is central to Hinduism, the name applied by outsiders to the value system of the people of the land of the river Indus. It is not incidental, like the story of Hermaphrodites in Greek mythology (born of the union of Hermes, messenger of the gods, with Aphrodite, the goddess of love) who becomes joined in one body with the nymph Salmacis. The concept of *Ardhanariswara* is exemplified and reinforced by such appellations of God as *Sripati* (husband of Sri), *Sitaram* (Rama of Sita), *Umamaheshwar* (Siva of Uma), *Gowrishankar* and *Lakshminarayan*. Many of the ordained Hindu rites of passage have to be performed by man and wife together, not singly.

This acceptance and celebration of the man-woman relationship has its counterpart in the sacralisation of the infant god Krishna, whose supernal beauty and earthy pranks are those of every child. The Hindu

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pantheon is thus a reflection and redemption of humankind and its transactions: the love of mother for child, celebrated in the Kannada song 'Krishna nee vegame', whose enactment in dance by Balasaraswati is among the cherished memories of those, in India and abroad, who have been privileged to watch her perform; the man-woman mutuality celebrated in Sitakalyanam or Sita's marriage with Rama, which is the theme of countles songs and paintings; and the joy of union, accentuated by the pangs of separation, in and outside marriage, celebrated in song by the bridal mystics —— Kshetragnya and Jayadeva, Meera and Andal.

III

Among the supreme examples of the fusion of ethics and aesthetics is Tyagaraja (1767-1846), the composer-saint. His mother tongue was Telugu but he was born in the Tamil country and, like all educated persons of that time, knew Sanskrit. On the fifth day of the Indian lunar month of Bahula, which might fall in December or January, the death anniversary of Tyagaraja draws a large concourse of musicians and music lovers to Tiruvaiyaru, a small town on the bank of the river Kaveri in the Tanjore district. The high point of the observance is the collective singing of five celebrated compositions of Tyagaraja, the Pancha Ratna (five gems), even as the statue installed in the temple dedicated to him is anointed by priests.

The ritual of worship is exactly the same as in much older temples of South India dedicated to gods and goddesses conceived by the poetic imagination long ago, and regarded as present eternally unlike the musician saint who is known to have lived and died in historic time. He is the most prolific among the great composers of Indian music, and is comparable in this respect to Shakespeare and Dostoevsky among writers, and to Bach among composers, in the West.

Persons with a god-like gift have tended to be regarded in India as manifestations in human form, or incarnations, of divinity. The divinities are numerous, and each symbolizes a principle or force. Saraswati, for instance, is the goddess of learning and of music, as Lakshmi is of wealth and well-being. Narada is the celestial singer. It is also part of the tradition for a family or an individual to adore an *Ishta Devata* or favoured deity. Tyagaraja's favoured deity, whom he celebrates in hundreds of songs, is Rama, hero of the Ramayana epic composed by Valmiki. Commentators on Tyagaraja are therefore apt to describe him as an incarnation at once of Saraswati, of Narada and of Valmiki.

Each composition of Indian music is set in one particular mode, comprising selected tones of a scale and set in a specific pattern, which is known as a raga. The songs are not of any great length. The composer only

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outlines the treatment of the raga. Its delineation in detail is left to the creative improvisation of the performer, vocalist or instrumentalist. It is for the performer to delve into the defined and delimited, though immense,a universe of sound which each raga is, and to come up with such treasures of musical phrasing as he half-creates and half-perceives.This improvisation is in contrast to the detailed notation of long musical works by composers of western music. What corresponds to a whole movement occupying ten minutes or more in a western symphony may be indicated by the Indian composer in two lines whose words would take less than half -a-minute to read. An Indian lyric is divided into sections, corresponding to the movements of a western composition: the Pallavi or opening verse, usually of one line; the Anupallavi, of two lines; and the Charana, each of four lines, of which there can be a half dozen.

Tyagaraja composed more than six hundred such lyrics, in more than a hundred ragas. However, it is not the volume of Tyagaraja's work, mind-boggling though it is, but its richness in musical material that was won for him the prime position among music composers of South India.

Not everyone who renders a Tyagaraja composition either himself experiences, or delights the listener with, the miracle of Raga Bhava (literally, the 'feeling' of a raga), the communication of its inwardness and beauty. As with melody, so with rhythm a *Tala*. At its best, rhythm in Indian music resides in the subtle interstices within a syllable, rather than in the emphatic division of a *Tala* cycle into fixed units which the mere entertainer regales his audience with. The entertainer is hugely ego-aware, and titillates the senses instead of securing release from the ego either for himself or for his audience. It is the grand masters who evoke the Bhava of a raga and lift the listener to the near-zero-gravity space of ego absence: a T.R. Mahalingam on the flute, a Sripada Pinakapani among southern vocalists, or a Pran Nath in the northern style. They exemplify Indian music at its best, of which Arnold Blake writes in *The New Oxford History of Music*: "It is impossible to divorce Indian music from the whole structur of Indian culture and philosophy. To the Indian student, music is not an isolated phenomenon but one inextricably linked with philosophy and religion, and of cosmic importance. The right kind of music-that is to say, the only music worth considering-is that which deserves the epithet Vimuktida, or 'bestowing liberation'."

Tyagaraja celebrates this high music in several of his compositions. In a song in the raga *Saramati*, for instance:

"Can there be *Moksha* for one
Who has not gained release while living,
For one without devotion-fired music?"

And in the raga *Jaganmohini*:

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"Adore the glittering seven notes,
Hail the seven beautiful gods."

He affirms in the raga *Sankarabharanam*:

"The royal path to the bliss of heaven and beyond
Is devotion imbued with the nectar of the seven notes."

The greater part of Tyagaraja's compositions are in adoration of his favourite deity, Rama: sensuous, earthy description of his form; glorification of his deeds; and celebration of the loving mutuality of Rama and Sita (daughter of King Janaka and therefore also known as Janaki). The symbiotic relationship of male and female exemplified by Rama and Sita is more profound than the concept of male-female equality which has emerged in recent decades in the West. There can be alienation and conflict between equals, while mutuality is equality with harmonious togetherness. Of interest in this context is a composition in the raga *Kamboji* in which Tyagaraja identifies himself with Sita and ascribes Lord Rama's achievements to his good fortune in securing the hand of "our Janaki".

IV

Equality of the sexes is, for the egalitarian saints of the *Bhakti* school, part of a value syndrome which rejects mediation between man and god by priests. These saints affirm the oneness of human beings irrespective of differences in economic and social status arising from the accident of birth. Thus Tyagaraja said "To the worthy one whose mind is controlled, what need of magical spells or rites? Irrelevant to him are the conventional divisions of society into castes, and of life into stages (Varnashrama)."

The propagation of humanist values by the composers of classical music has its counterpart in folk music. There is a rich repertoire of folk songs with humanist and egalitarian content in every region of India. They include the songs of the Bauls, or wandering minstrels, of Bengal; the verses of Kabir, born in a low caste in the 15th century but venerated as a saint, who wrote," Hari is in the East, Allah is in the West; look within your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram"; the verses of Guru Nanak, whose teachings form the basis of the Sikh faith, as sung by his Muslim disciple Mardana; the prayer of Gujarat's Nearsi Mehta, popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, "Ishwar and Allah are both Your names; grant us all good mind"; and the more recent compositions of Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali and of Subramanya Bharati in Tamil.

Thus has music in India been pressed, over the centuries, into the service of humanism and therefore universal ethic which not only incorporates the best values of the traditional religions but also anticipates

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those of the socialist and femininist movements of our time.

Here are some lines from Bharati's poem *Viduthalai* ('Freedom'), with a tilt which translation cannot capture, which is known to almost all Indians whose mother tongue is Tamil and to many others besides:

There shall be none of low degree,
And none shall be oppressed:
Born in India, all are of noble birth.
In man and woman alike,
No more of subordination.

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The Taxi Driver

K.S.Duggal

"These damned rich!' Exclaimed Dittu contemptuously. As he parked his taxi opposite his *kholi*, he noticed a wallet lying on the back seat bulging with currency notes. Evidently, it belonged to some passenger. Rather than feel happy about it -- it was a windfall -- Dittu felt frightfully uneasy. What should he do with it? It was already late in the evening. He had been plying his taxi throughout the length and breadth of the town the whole day through. His last passenger, he had picked up on the roadside and dropped at the railway station. Where could he look for the owner of the purse?

Dittu was convinced that the money found like this was always accursed. He had already suffered once. Some hussy had forgotten her attache case in his taxi. They hardly have their wits about them these moneyed people. Every article in the attache case was like the plague. It was then that his wife had contacted leukoderma. She put on someone else's blouse and sari, the stupid woman, and was afflicted with the incurable malady.

For a long time thereafter, whosoever engaged his taxi, Dittu would first ask the name and address of the passenger. People thought that the Sikh taxi driver was crazy. Dittu explained to them - "You rich folk are most careless. You may leave something behind in the taxi. And then it becomes a problem for the poor taxi driver. He can neither return it nor retain it."

Dittu had to give up this practice because every time he asked this question, the passenger would start arguing with him. And now it had happened again. Now if only he knew the name and address of the passenger, he could have gone and returned the purse and have been done with it.

Whenever he saw the white ugly blotches on his wife's face he told himself, "I will never have anything to do with what doesn't belong to me".

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With someone else's wallet in his hand today, Ditty remembered an incident that took place several years ago in the main bazaar of their hometown back in Pakistan. He was then not Dittu , the refugee; he was young Hardit Singh, son of well-to-do parents. He had just finished his matriculation examination. One evening when he was passing through the bazaar on his bicycle, he saw a parcel lying in the middle of the road. He got down from the bicycle and picked it up. It was properly sealed. It was also fairly heavy. He looked around . The traffic in the bazaar seemed endless. The shopkeepers were preoccupied with their customers. Nobody seemed to have noticed him. Without giving another thought, Dittu put his feet on the pedal and rode out of the bazaar with the parcel. At the very first opportunity, he stepped in a secluded corner and started opening the parcel - One layer of the packing paper, another, yet another, and then layer after layer. It looked as though someone had played a trick. The parcel was so many layers of packing paper, and nothing else. The shopkeepers who are maligned day in and day out were obviously testing the honesty of the common citizens. And Dittu felt, he had blackened his face. He felt like a spooky hen. Every bit of his body seemed to be disintegrating. Some shopkeepers had made a fool of him. Why hadn't he handed over the parcel to one of the shopkeepers on the roadside? The one who had supposedly lost it would have come looking for it and that shopkeeper could have restored it to him. On the contrary, Dittu had picked it up and hurried out of the bazaar riding his cycle. It was godsent for him that the country was partitioned soon thereafter, and they had to leave their hometown, otherwise Dittu would never have been able to pass through that bazaar again.

A similar problem confronted him today. For a moment he thought he would leave the wallet as it was on the back seat. But, then, that would be stupid. His little son would come to clean the car first thing in the morning. What would he think? Besides, he himself would be driving the taxi all through the day. How could he let a stranger's wallet lie unclaimed like that? It was like inviting someone to pocket it.

Lost in thought Dittu walked into his *kholi.* Banti was waiting for him, which as a devoted wife she did every evening. Finding the wallet in Dittu's hands, she pounced and in the twinkling of an eye she snatched it from him . She could guess from the predicament writ large on her husband's face that the wallet had been left behind by someone in the taxi . Her husband had never had any use for a wallet. Whatever he earned, he shoved it into his pocket. On returning home, he emptied it for his wife who started sorting it out, currency notes on one side and coins on the other.

Didn't I tell you it's not wise to keep money in a wallet? If the wallet is lost, all the money goes."

"But who is the blessed one who left it in our taxi"? asked his

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jubilant wife.

If Dittu only knew it, he would have long gone back and restored it to him.

"Banti, we should have nothing to do with other people's money". Dittu told his wife.

There was agony on his face. He knew his wife wouldn't listen to him. She never listened to him in such matters.

"Who said I am going to have anything to do with it? I'll pass it on to the creditors who keep on pestering me,"said Banti casually.

"She is an impossible woman!" Dittu muttered to himself.

"What is wrong with it?

Banti had heard him curse her.

"Is this hole of a room a place fit to live in? Dark and dingy. How long are we going to languish here? Not many days, and my son would be school-going age . The daughter is now small but girls hardly take any time to grow up. Our neighbour started bothering about the dowry immediately after she delivered a baby girl. Everyone says the only remedy for my wretched ailment is good wholesome food."

"I agree, but why must we think of all this now - with money that does n't belong to us?

"How does it not belong to us? It's our own money. We haven't gone and robbed anyone . Someone left his purse in our taxi; are we expected to throw it away?

"Stop it, stop this nonsense," Dittu was trying to shut his ears.

"What's nonsense about it?" shouted back Banti. Does anyone ever lose his honest earnings? Had it been hard earned money, do you think he would be so casual about it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the fellow lost his money the way he got it. It was our good luck that we found it."

"Rubbish, I'll not allow you to touch the money that doesn't belong to us."

"May I know what you are going to do with the wallet?"

"I'll offer it to our deity."

"Deities looked after by cheats -- the *pujaris."*

"I'll give it to some needy person".

"Who is more needy than us?"

"Banti, I ask you not to have anything to do with the money that doesn't belong to us."

"If I do ....."

"I'll skin you alive," Dittu shouted. He had never been so rude to his wife before.

Fearing that he might lose his temper again, Dittu got into his bed

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and went to sleep.

Dittu had not slept for long when he started having bad dreams. He dreamt that he had hardly left his house in his taxi in the morning when the sentry on duty on the main road had challenged him for no fault of his. He begged of him to forgive him, again and again, but he wouldn't listen to him. When Dittu tried to touch his feet, the wretched policeman gave him a kick in his tummy... He arrived at the taxi stand, as usaual, long before the others, and yet no one turned up to engage him. He waited, and waited , all day. Eventually, he got so tired of waiting, he pulled out his taxi and went out looking for a passenger on the road. He had hardly gone a kilometer when a military truck speeding headlong rammed into his taxi, crushing the car and killing the driver instantly.

Dittu woke up from his sleep. He was perspiring profusely. Banti was fast asleep in her bed. She had the wallet held firmly to her bosom. Dittu tried to snatch it from her. She woke up suddenly and grappled with her husband. In the struggle, Dittu lost his patience and smacked Banti on her face. Banti gave a loud shriek. Dittu gave her another blow.

Such scuffles were not unusual in the quarters Dittu lived in. Taxi drivers were used to such scenes. While none of the neighbours bothered about it, their son Gullu woke up. Rubbing his eyes, he rushed to his mother. She was hurling filthy abuse at his father.

Dittu felt ashamed of himself. He should not have behaved the way he did. He had never lost his temper like that all his life. In utter remorse he slipped into his bed and covered his face with the blanket.

"Why did *Bapu* beat you, Ma?" Gullu asked the mother. Banti didn't reply.

"Why did *Bapu* beat you, Ma?"after a little while, the child asked again. His father had turned his back towards them and had gone off to sleep.

"Why did *Bapu* beat you, Ma?" asked Gullu for the third time.

"It matters not child. Husbands sometimes do beat their wives." Banti tried to explain to her son.

And then, as if nothing unusual had happened, taking her son in her arms, Banti put out the lantern and retired. A little later she got up again. Lighting the lantern, she started counting the currency notes in the wallet Dittu had found. She counted out the notes for long. Then she called out to her son who was still struggling to go to sleep.

"Gullu, have you ever seen a hundred rupees note?"

"No , Ma"

"Gullu, have you ever seen a fifty rupees note?"

"No, Ma."

"Gullu, have you ever seen..."

And then she found that Gullu too, had gone off to sleep , just like her husband, the taxi driver, fast asleep across the room in his bed.

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No Beautiful Tomorrows

Bunny Reuben

It was too good to be true, he told himself for the thousandth time. It was too good to be true, and he was right. He stared up at the ceiling and tried to breathe without making any noise. It pained him, under the chest, and he felt sick and cold. The family clock outside struck four.

He had counted it strike two and three, but she hadn't . He raised up slowly on an elbow and looked down at her. Serene beauty, the innocence of sleep; a great peace was about her. It wrenched something deeply through him so each time he looked at her he fell in love. It was an emotion he had never experienced until they got her married to him.

That was over eighteen months back, and he knew it was too good to be true. She was a fulfilment. He had raised the veil of flowers from her face after the marriage ceremony and looked into her eyes. All his life he would never forget what happened to him then. His belly went sick inside him and his being turned over and over. There was a mole beneath her full rose lower lip, like the wondrous splendour of a black moon in a white night.

He looked at the mole now. He saw her slightly parted lips and the storm of tresses a halo of purity about her face. He saw one shell ear curled up near her cheek, the lobe curling outward. It was inexpressibly beautiful, and it was agony in him to look at her. He could not understand how he reacted so deeply to her; after all she was only his wife. Everyone had wives, and they walked five steps behind their husbands and placated their howling children. He felt so deeply for her one would think he was an artist contemplating an embodiment of eternal beauty and divinity, instead of a rich promising young lawyer looking at his wife.

He was in love with her ears. He was in love with her eyebrows, her nose, her throat, her arms, her breasts. Each portion of her was a separate entity, with an individual personality, and the sum total of these personalities was a consummate fulfilment.

He bent his head slightly and took the lobe between his lips. He

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could see the tiny curls nestling about her ear. He held still like that a moment. She stirred in her sleep, murmuring, and turned over on her back. The full moon of her face was a dazzling vision in him, and suddenly he wanted to cry. She was a manifestation of God: sleeping in his bed, far away from him.

He put his mouth gently on hers. The infinite tenderness of the caress overflowed him and he kissed her hard. Her eyes opened. She held like that looking into his eyes, and then her arms came up around him.

He clung wildly to her, a soft moaning sigh escaping him. Then he broke, laying his face on her shoulder, buried in the pillow. A sharp salt stinging came behind his eyeballs.

Her hand on his back patted him.

"You'll be alright, no?" she whispered. "You'll be well again soon."

He did not move. That was it, he thought, hope for the best. It had come to this now.

"You must not give up hope," she whispered. "When you fight a case you've never lost, because you never give up hope. So even now we'll win."

Momentary, infinite silence. He heard himself breathe. She felt his body against hers, tense, fighting something. She was soft and relaxed and her being flooded out to him. She caressed his hair, his body, easing him so all his being was concentrated in her hands.

"There's nothing in this small town for you," she whispered. "Why don't you go to that famous hospital in America? There's still time. It would be much better for you."

He did not answer. He couldn't tell her they'd left it far too late, to find out what really was wrong with him. And he could not tell her he could not leave her and go.

"After my father sent me to college,"he said slowly, his face still hidden in her shoulder, "I ceased to believe in God . I don't know why. It happened gradually. One day, thinking about it, I realised that if human nature weren't what it is, there wouldn't be any need for lawyers. And if human health weren't what it is, there would be no need of doctors. Then I...".

He stopped suddenly, tensing. She clung him quickly to her.

"Don't say it ," she whispered. "You don't have to say anything. I understand."

They lay silently. She could hear his broken breathing, sense his unceasing internal struggle.

"I don't care," he whispered intensely. "I don't care what happens to me! But you. You...".

"No...' she curled her fist in his hair and pulled his head up so she was looking into his eyes. She saw the uncontrollable brightness of them.

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"Nothing'd happen to me if you.... when you get well."

"If I get well," he said fiercely. "You don't have to pretend with me!"

"Let's not talk about it," she whispered. "Let's not talk about anything bad so early in the morning . I...I cannot be without you. Isn't that enough?"

He laughed bitterly.

"For me, yes! But not for the God you pray to !"

She was silent. He felt her instinctive hurt.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "Forgive me. Forgive me so many things. That I married you, that ...".

"Rukmini!"

The strident voice of the old woman and the loud noises of early morning awakening. She got up quickly.

"Coming!"

He watched her as she quickly wore her *sari*. Her every movement was a perfection in grace, and her sinuous winding into the *sari* was etched sharply into his consciouness. He drank in the beauty of her bosom before she wore her *choli* . Then she was gone. He heard the old woman, his mother's voice.

"Don't you know it's late! You've got to fill the water yet!"

Then the door banged, cutting him off from her.

The old woman stood in the dark hall, arms akimbo, staring at the girl smoothing her hair quickly into place.

"You've learned to sleep late very well in your father's home! You seem to forget there's work to be done! Go in the kitchen!"

The girl held her eyes a moment, then went ahead of her. The woman followed, muttering audibly.

"They're all the same, these educated girls! Send them to college and they think they've seen the world! Huh! The ill-omened hussy! Hardly a year and she's brought evil into my home!"

Her face flushed and she could feel the burning in her ears. But she held silent. In the kitchen the other women were already at work. They stared at her.

She felt their instinctive hostility and it hurt deeply. There was no home in this house for her, except her husband . She stood in the kitchen washplace and opened the tap, putting a *hunda* beneath it. She felt it, all the time, their eyes, watching her, hating her, the ill-omened creature who had brought evil into their home. Just one year married to their only son, and he became ill.

The old woman was watching her.

"Come on! Come on! Don't take all morning over it! We've got to finish our bath before the water goes!

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She lifted the full *hunda* quickly out and put another under the flowing tap. Her father was a wealthy landowner in a neighbouring village. She wan't used to this kind of work , and it hurt her lower back doing it . But an inner core of stubbornness and pride kept her at it so she would never suffer the indignity of their jeers.

She had unconsciously tried to please them at first, striven to be accepted as a woman among women, but she knew now this could never be, not after they found out what was wrong with her husband.

"Take this in to him!" the old woman said loudly.

She turned. The old woman was proffering a glass of warm milk. She took it.

"Be careful! Don't drop it !"

They watched her go. She could hear them mutter something, and the old woman sniggered.

She heard him coughing. Quietly she opened the door. He was hanging half out of the window, shaking convulsively. The blood drained from her face. Banging the glass on a table she rushed to him.

He heard her and turned, leaning against the window, laughing in great suffocating gasps. There was blood trickling from the side of his mouth. He staggered blindly but she held him, and then he did not fall.

"Leave me alone", he gasped. "Leave me alone. It won't be very long now."

He saw her pale, bright-eyed attraction, staring at him, wiping the blood off his mouth with the end of her *sari.*

"Why should you care what happens to me !" he laughed bitterly. "Nothing great is happening! Don't you read the papers? Every year five hundred thousand people like me die in our country! The other day our Health Minister announced that one person dies every ten minutes of this - - this wretched disease... over here! Laught Don't you see how funny it is ? My minute is also coming!"

She turned to get the glass of milk, but she could not conceal her tears. She came to him with the glass, her eyelashes lowered.

"Drink this."

He looked at her and a tidal wave of remorse swept him. He knew he had hurt her.

He took the glass from her, drank the milk slowly. She watched him. When he finished she took the glass and turned to go, but he held her hand and pulled her down beside him, not leaving her hand. Before she knew it, he was clinging her to him, fiercely.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "Bear with me. My mother doesn't like you, isn't it. Nobody likes you. They're saying you're ill-omened,

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aren't they?"

"No! You're only imagining things!"

He smiled.

"No. But don't worry. I've thought about that too. I've thought about everything."

She looked her question at him.

"Don't worry," he said again. "You'll know when you'll know. Only don't worry about what they may think of you, because they've neither the mind nor the desire to think of anyone but themselves. Shall I tell you something?"

"Yes?" she tried a smile but didn't succeed.

"Take care of yourself. Be kind to yourself and forgive yourself just as you forgive others!"

This time she really laughed.

She got up and went with the glass . He watched her back until the door shut behind her. Even after she went, her could see the unconscious grace of her form, her rounded figure, clearly outlined under the *sari*.

The room was drab and empty . Now he was alone, and the intangible nets of frustration and helplessness again fell about him. If only he had found out sooner. If only he cancelled the thought quickly. It was an effort to empty his mind of the vicious circle of regret and frustration, because there was nothing anyone could do. It was, he laughed bitterly, the doctrine of *karma* on which he had been nurtured since childhood. Die on the wrong side of the Ganges and you'd be reborn an ass. Anyway, he wasn't going to die on either side of the Ganges, and he wasn't going to be reborn. It seemed as simple as that, when you didn't believe in God.

He hadn't believed in anything except himself, and then after they got him married, in her. Thinking of it, it seemed the only sensible thing his parents had done. If it was any other girl except Rukmini would he have felt the same? He tried not to think of it.

He tried to imagine this house without himself. He thought of her alone, of her never ending aloneness. She was so young and so beautiful. Suddenly the overwhelming desire to scream, to hit out at anything, fiercely, more fiercely, bit through him. He knew he would have to go, and he did not want to go.

Her ears, two beautiful little playthings, the exquisite sensation of taking them in his lips; her breasts, lying down, standing up, tea-brown, comforting, so he could lay his head between them and experience his nearest approach to divinity, an opium non-knowing of himself and the future, of anything evil, and there is only loveliness and a great, never ending happiness flowing from the contact of her breasts and his lips, through his being. He too had only two luxuries to brood on, her loveliness and the hour of his death. If he possessed them both in the same

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minute he could die content. We don't have any medical facilites in this small town hours, the doctor kept saying. Your family has money. Go to America. Much as he knew about it. Why should he die away from her, when he could die near her?

Dawn had brightened outside. The house was peculiarly quiet. Why hadn't the old man got up yet? He always looked in as soon as he did. He felt curiously light and disembodied, utterly comfortable and lax as though he did not belong in his pitiful body any more. He was not at home now, and days were passing. He was not at home, and she was moving about the room quietly, so quietly, her head bowed, her entire body submissive. Once she looked at him and he was trying to say something. She was moving about again, and his mother was jumping round and round her, brandishing a rolling-pin.He tried to shout but couldn't , and his mother kept on jumping round and round her. She was so beautiful. Didn't they see him lying there? Then why was she jumping about like that? Why were they tormenting her? And then two great tears welled from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

Someone was saying something; his mother was weeping, but she was standing there, dry eyed and proud, and only he could see inside her, where she wept. It won't be long now, someone said. A year, a month, a day. Not that it made any difference, except that it'd mean no more days of feeling the exquisite pearl softness of the lobes of her ears in his lips, caressed to an agony of sensation; no beautiful tomorrows when you were reborn through your lips browsing among her breasts, a perfection of peace and beauty that was your peculiar conception of consummated divinity; no beautiful tomorrows to feel the silk of her body and the never ending wonder at such human perfection, no, no more beautiful tomorrows.

She was sweeping the room when he opened his eyes.

"I was asleep," he said. "I dreamt of you."

He watched thather sweep.

"I dreamt that I was not here, and you were alone."

Still she did not look at him, but only went on weeping.

"I mean alone. Always alone. Aren't you too young to be alone?"

She looked at him then.

"What's your age?"

"It makes no difference," she said quietly.

"Maybe not. But tell me."

"I'll be twenty in a couple of months."

He laughed.

"And you said it makes no difference ! Can't you imagine what its like to be twenty and have nothing to look forward to?"

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"No ."

"Can't you try?"

"No."

She held his eyes. He felt again the proud and lonely isolation of her. Then she turned and continued sweeping.

"I'm sorry about the child," he said.

He saw her hand jerk stop, but she didn't turn.

"Don't talk about it,"

"You understand I couldn't do anything about it. It ... it fell..."

"Please!" her voice broke.

But what can I do for you, I ...."

He paused.

"You will be both rich... and happy—"

He saw her body tense. She flung aside the broom and slammed out.

"Rukmani" Rukmani! Listen! I...I can't live without you!"

She did not return.

He lay panting on the bed. Why had he tried to tell her? It was madness. The pain was there again, dull and insidous, biting beneath his chest. He coughed; his mouth went salty and warm. He expectorated into the spitoon. The blood was profuse.

A sudden spasm of coughing seized him and he went giddy. The whole room seemed to be whirling round and round him, brandishing rolling-pins, and he was alone in the middle, trying to break through a net that had fallen on him. Suddenly there seemed to be a great noise, like a lot of people talking together, and the sounds of women's voices howling and weeping. Faces were looking down at him, anxiously; he heard his name. There she was, mixed up in the crowd, wide-eyed and staring, and everyone seemed to be saying everything at the same time. It was getting cold now. He lost consciousness .

"The ill-omened trollop! *Hai ram,* why didn't you take *her* instead of my son!"

The old women went off into hysterical screams.

The girl was there in the kitchen, in the middle of them. They were all staring at her . Some of them tried to console the old women . The innumerable relatives constantly hovering around the house had begun their funereal chanting outside now.

"She killed him! She! She!" saliva dribbled from the old woman's mouth and she struggled in the grasp of the women, trying to reach the girl. "She killed him because of the property"! She charmed him, the strumpet! She cast an evil spell over him! Did you see what she did to him? Look! look at the will!"

She fumbled in the folds of her dirty *sari.* Her hands were trembling, her eyes wild. She flung the paper at them.

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"See how considerate he was to her ! My son! says she's young! Says she can't be expected to suffer because of something that happened through no fault of her own ! So what does he do ? He leaves her all his property and money, only on condition she remarries ! Ha! Ha!"

She went off into a trailing lunatic laughter.

"As if that's so difficult for her ! The strumpet, strumpet! And he makes it more easy by leaving her only a pittance if she doesn't!"

She was laughing and choking like a maniac . The girl stooped and picked up the will, folded it quietly. Someone jerked it from her hand. She moved to the door.

"That's right! Get out! Get out and remarry, you trollop!"

The increasing hordes of relatives were still howling outside. It was late now. The house and compound outside were filling up with people, whispering softly among themselves, looking furtively at her, falling silent as she passed. No one spoke to her. The old man was there, staring at her.

But what I can do for you, I...

You will be both rich... and happy

She saw the old woman hurriedly screwing up the will in the fold of her *saree* and she perceived how utterly irrelevant it was, the choice he'd laid down for her in that pitiable scrap of paper.

There was the great numbness of surfeited emotion in her as she walked out into the garden overlooking the road. She was barely conscious of more people arriving, looking curiously at her. There was the vague feeling that there was something she must do; something she had forgotten to do. Take him his evening milk. Yes, but. Can you imagine what it's like to have something to look back to? A home that died in a house that existed. There is no thought, no sensation, no being. Only the dry eyed refuges of pride that push back the shoulders so your breasts strain defiantly outward and you hold your head high so you cannot weep to desecrate the memory of beautiful living.

Outside the compound people are walking past, and cyclists and a few cars. Can you hear some boys laughing? There are girls coming home from school now. Can't you understand why he did it? Can you forget? Can an empty future negate a pregnant past when there is no present and can never be ?

Those schoolgirls are dancing along home, the sunrise of innocence on their faces, bright with the promise of beautiful tomorrows. It is getting cooler now, and the gul-mohur blossoms are shivering occasionally down, like passionate gashes on the senses.

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Ten Poems

Jayanta Mahapatra

AN EVENING BY THE RIVER

Dark hills, softening in provocative shadow,
sift like fantasies in this river. So like shapes
love takes. Here, on the rim of the stone embankment
How often have I sat and watched the light part.
From afar an unknown Bird's tense cry,
netting one like a scent, suddenly. And I remember
the value I've placed on you. The slight quiver
of your lips that's almost painful here
in the momentary ripple on the water, trying
to catch the last sparkle of day, before the nightwind
sucks and corrodes the warm hours
drifting in the wake of boats long gone east.

But what makes sense unless one lives in things
made by ourselves? In tales lost, in an absence,
in an awakening burnt to ashes to face
this image of my inner sense of defeat?
I recollect the sunlight rustling the leaves
of your eyes, and I stop and retreat underneath
with the moment so I don't lose it.
When you come back tomorrow, I know, your smile
like the blossoms of this wild creeper on the bank,
will, merely look about us, will reveal nothing.
And now beware, the words of this poem say,
of going with it into dream
or of making it seem like the last words of a prayer —

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beware of the unreasonable wind inside
that tries to surpass this one which rises now
spiteful and mean, tying the birds
to the trees in the dark.

TRAPPED

Once again, footsteps I hear outside, those
I seem to recognize, hear the leaves's dark yearning
for the wind. All night the lights
have been burning in the house across the street,
Perhaps resting her head in her palms and the small dark woman I seldom see
upon the cold sill and waiting. It's
not yet morning, I know; the night watchman's
stick taps fiercely the gravelled face of the road.
Your weariness faces the cool blue haze
of the coming day like the stale air
of an empty room. The moon's babble
grows incoherent, like a dying man's, hour to hour.
A sudden gust of wind through the window
shreds the night-jasmines of your eyes,
hustles me into my dream once again –
a dream shrouded as a shut, dark cupboard
streaming with ants. I cannot mistake
the rusts of the night scampering through my blood.

AN OCTOBER MORNING

Dawn edges its way through the crowd of huddled trees,
a mole scurries away behind a fallen log. Somewhere
the sound of a truck starting, like the question
one had sullenly fallen asleep with, resuming

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in the brain. A flight of parakeets
circling for a while before their cries are lost
in the distance that holds the sunken river,
stoically silent. Cries that fill and empty the mind
at the same time, touching the decaying timber
by the shore, a trail losing itself in life,
saying nothing. How do we know what we are like,
when we can turn to the dreams we find, and build
the pose of distance to serve as symbol?
And what a lone cry does sometimes, heading through
to the empty room where man can dream up ways
to prey on his own kind? Thinner than this dawn light
are the instants inside of us that reach the top
of the rise, where the world spreads the slow flush
of beginning once again, and where we clearly forget
our own deaths. A breathless light in which a woman
suddenly realizes that she must find something
to hide her nakedness. And in which a temple too
can send its sleepy bells fluttering
over the smug roofs like a flock of pigeons.
The morning is here, looking out of a hole
in a clay bank like the furry snout of a jackal,
as familiar dark-eyed women shout to one another
near the public water faucet; and two young boys,
sensing their parents' wrongs, grow up genially
to be men; and we know we aren't ready yet for answers
or for the heart's cries, as a web of light
is flung across those dim places of the body
where we hate to hide again.

THIS IS THE SEASON OF THE OLD RAIN

This is the season of the old rain,
always with much to answer before time is done
with decay and death and shutting our minds
to the plot of the jasmine which thrives in backyards
on the edge of stark water. Here is the bamboo

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dropping beads of twilight on earth's stricken floor;
bent and outstretched, gesturing gloomily into a gray sky.
This is the time when the fruit of my life
seems humble and tender against the dark banyan,
when the season comes alive with memories
of earlier years. And when one's hand, suddenly
lightened from the weight of elusive beauty, is
almost ready to touch another's. One knows now
how the moon has tricked the mind, surrounded
by the loves one has slowly grown old with.
Traveller , where is it you belong?
Perhaps watching the old woman marooned on a treetop
hemmed in by a wild layer of water called death,
the unseen touches me with one of its
lonely wet winds, unearthing a vein of life.
Perhaps here in her eyes the rebellious season
held an answer to whatever I sought ,
having walked up to the place that grew darker
against torn homes and flattened hearths
and where the sunset threw up its bloodied hands.
Once I remember I turned to death
as symbol of my age's memory, and the rain
was green on the grass that chose me my palimpsest
not to learn. And now, it carries one away,
the seen miracle in those eyes, closing and opening,
revealing neither sorrow nor hope nor loss
and cutting down the fruit of my silent season.

OF A DAWN

What do you want from me now?
It's not yet light; perhaps the nesting warbler
in the deodar has sensed your breath already.
The dawn looks strange; skilled in the world's ways
old men feel their shrunken years
and return to their dark with an insane longing
for injustice; hanging from a crow's claws
the guts of a swift tremble in the clear air.

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What do I know of those things
which let themselves be measured by a quiet
submissive frame of hurt, by a soft trust?
This dawn is different from others, yet
it is no different. It hides a long nakedness.
Soon butterflies shall grow funky with the sun,
and the silvery seclusion of sleepy-eyed girls
renewed against voyages of the light.
Do I owe you something of my life?
Perhaps this pretence of mine would be enough
this morning, when every sound, every shadow
takes on an unease, an imperfection,
to force purpose upon the heart's darker beat;
and now I can hear you awaking, elsewhere,
oriole-call in your ears; now suddenly in fear
of love's bare hour of absence and drift,
to start a flight of crows in the blood.

LOVE FRAGMENT

Footsteps approach along the courtyard,
across the days your unknown face
measures mine with a creeping friendship,
and I put my heart away so you cannot see,
climbing the mountains on foot
as I tremble to their earth, carrying
the fire farther to choose the manner of my life
that must light up the darkness of my hour.

It is November, and I can ask for more,
because I do not know you even in memory,
and my need touches new hands,
but the bells ring
in your faraway summer heart
under your sleeping breasts,
perhaps to begin a little dance of time
that's caught with my few unspoken words
as they bow their heads over your awakening.

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My mind sweeps on ahead, but there are
no secrets to tell. Glazed with sun and air
your eyes blossom on an aging man's glance
in the middle of a dream's square. A warm wind
of footsteps that drapes me in the years of youth,
a spring day again at the beginning of winter.
And I take you into my heart,
a country that will settle down to another day,
pale and worn and hungry for darkness
by what I do not know.

IT'S MY ROOM ONCE AGAIN

It's my room once again, the accustomed chair,
those books around me, the ball-point in my hand.
Weeks of rain have weakened the earth, the corners
of memory to shudder with a growth of moss.
The sky so far away, its clouds floating across
like men with dark faces being led to prison.
The sound of a wet garment beaten against a stone.
Last night's news bulletins strewn upon the wet streets.
And I've been trying not to mark time in here.
But all of them keep coming into my room,
and I find myself in a breathless silent tableau,
a game of speech in which I invariably lose.
I can feel the words coming between us. Or was it space?
Was it a blindness that pushed my body
against each breath of mine, a laughter in every voice?
A knot of unspoken words slides down my throat.
I do not know what I want : I ape a poet's poise,
in my soiled shirt as though it were empty of its body,
as though what was inside was all thin mind;
and I ape the stone of my fathers: bland eyes,
meek shoulders, to take whatever might come.
Here, wasn't this pure deceit? I see them all
trying hard not to stare at me, in their midst,
and I shake my head sadly, get up from the chair
to walk over to the window — before my hour —

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my feet firmly braced upon the floor, and feeling how
just pretending as if I were on stage could be enough,
knowing I could say no more, or be someone special,
or lived like them rather than thought. And lost.

WAITING

I sit here, waiting for her, sit here
with the empty skin drooping over my shoulders
as I had sat waiting many times before
beside the same window, in the same old chair.
Once in a while I'd open my notebooks,
find the words I had written float away
into the wilderness on the other side of the paper.
Like the smoke drifting over the burning-ground
of my own flesh. I shut my tired eyes.
And I try not to think of the quick warm skin
of the eighteen-year-old girl I met last month.
I stretch my lonely lips into an unforgivable grin.
I turn my face over in the darkness of my room
and peer into it; but I don't remember now
when my beard started to grow.
I let the minute drop the hour to the ground;
but each time it came back, and I had to do this
all over again, to put my mind at ease.
I touch my shoulders; they are bare, contrite.
Like the shape of a deserted park bench in the rain.
Was some sort of change coming over me?
Or was it time's empty skin, waiting for an excuse
to advance the blood, to keep it occupied?
My notebooks are there, my pretty wife too,
but I have been with them, long in love,
and they have worn me slowly around the edges.
Or maybe it isn't because of *them*, themselves;
it is because of where I came from, and of
what I suddenly realized I was really waiting for;
the life that my life seeks, when I go in
to answer it; but it had gone the other way

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to where I couldn't meet it at all,
as I go back to where I was, by the same window,
without a word, waiting for her,
empty skin flapping like truce flags in a losing war.

AN AFTERNOON

This ineluctable afternoon sways under its weight.
The ordered arrangement of moments in the room
like the precise ticking of the trees outside,
and I recollect the unknown dead boy's mouth slacked open
like a carp's dragged up from the Mahanadi's depths,
the deodar I planted carelessly fifteen years ago
and words overcharged with reason on old mothers' lips
and hidden untiring worms
slipping into the silence under the quick feet of a girl
I love once.

So this memory,
this afternoon pressed like a dried flower against the window,
a surprise of light that breaks through the clouds at times,
the actions of friends, as we dodge them
to escape like competitors looking for an opening;
taken in by darkness through the inevitable fall
below to earth, by the winds of elusive desires,
the fantasy of gray-faced invasions . . .

How do I hear the voices of all these
as one long resounding cry — the bright light of day?
The stifled cough of someone ill
desperately trying not to be heard by the one he loves?
The great door opening brazenly
to reveal another misshapen light, light that held
the uncorrupted language of creation, of birth gone blind
as it leaps from tree to tree in the blazing sun?

I merely move my hands to my ears now
and try not to see the gargoyle of memory

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turn it all into farce. Ah peace,
let me remember the image of my worst dream,
the history I have torn out of my own mind.
Let me be taken in by a drug-drop of this light.

OF THIS EVENING

This evening I look at that part of myself
which remains with me, but I do not know
what it is, hard to recognize it any more.
I don't think I can reach it when I want it so much.
Is it beacuse my years have had a lot of weight
on them, or because the world has come to know
what I already know about that part of me?
A curtain rises slowly upon a stage
with nothing to reveal, no scene or spell or time.
And what remains is a tricky weapon,
difficult to use. It is not that I face
a total stranger suddenly sometimes,
like some wide door barred in rosewood and iron;
or that I hold that part responsible
for making me grovel in front of the world
that beats round me like my ambitious heart.
Days still pretend to belong:
they see me struggling to push them away
but I seem to have no strength left,
perhaps I shall follow quietly after them.
This evening a part of myself closes in on me,
the room seems awfully small and empty;
but I can hear the shame and pain of defeat
playing mercilessly about my shoulders,
the key lost, and that part trying to pry
my longing away which sits silent
like a gray owl on a branch of my breath,
eyes wide open in another dumb, dirty trick.

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Book Reviews

Inner Recesses and Outer Spaces: *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:* Navrang, New Delhi, 1986: Rs. 195 pp. 402

We have had innumerable official and unofficial biographies of politicians and patriots during the struggle for independence, but what we really need is the objective first-person recollections of an extraordinarily stirring period of Indian history. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's Memoirs are, therefore of particular significance as it is the the inner story of a woman and an inside story of a country.

Kamaladevi's life is an uncommon record of a woman in love with life who gave herself unstintingly to India's evolution as a free country. Curiously enough this political rebel who throughout the two decades before Independence travelled the world to exciting and dangerous places (and was constantly harassed by British Intelligence who tried to arrest her movements at every port of call) was nevertheless a beauty-loving introvert. The rebel and the revolutionary are often reserved but passionate people. As one who had often seen the inside of jails, the matrix of this quietly fiery personality was in a gentle traditional mould; a lifestyle of Indian culture that included nature, the stars and seasonal festivals that alas, all too few children know today.

It was the early twentieth century she wrote of her family that had cultivated their natural gifts and talents, "which to me were more exciting and great sources of perpetual delight". Family life then was where they could chant, recite and sing, were deft with their hands and made useful objects and gorgeous decorations of natural material like green leaves, fibres, flowers and nuts for festive occasions. This creativity was always original for every festival.

Today, in her 80s, Kamaladevi still wears flowers in her hair. They were an integral part of her early life, and had a special significance; indispensable in ceremonies and worship as an embodiment

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of one's devotion and reverence to whom they were offered. It was also an essential part of social life and every household in Karnataka had daily delivery of flowers for these courtesies.She writes warmly of the fun of making beautiful paper lanterns for Diwali and of how banana tree yielded all sorts of votive articles at the time of Dassehra. There was the sailing of little boats during Mahavasankranthi and the weeklong celebration of Janamasthmi when households would make little miniature scenes from the life of Krishna, lighting it all subtly with brass and earthern lamps.

These were the joys of life in those days, from gathering of flowers to the weaving of garlands the offerings to the household tulsi and the atmosphere of family joys which Kamaladevi felt was most particularly beautiful during the Gauri Puja. Nothing in those days displayed the commerce of art so prolific and vulgarised today and the rituals of life gave a child of that period a special kinship with both family and the past. This was the genesis of Kamaladevi who as a young woman came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. From a shy girl, who said that in later life "prison was a trial because she was not gregarious and lacked small talk", she became a redoubtable soldier in the fight for freedom. Rebels are almost never fiery extroverts. On the contrary, their spirit springs from the depths of souls filled with passion which circumstances turn into courageous champions of a cause. Gandhi was such a one himself.

Kamaladevi's first love was theatre, and it is here that she came into the Chattopadhyayaa family as variegated in its talents as an aviary of tropical birds in colourful plumage. She marrried the youngest of Sarojini Naidu's brothers, Harindranath, the most gifted poet in that family of astonshing talent. Harindranath was exotic, erotic and quixotic, a charmer with endless vitality, but these were a very poor combination for a good marriage which unfortunately lasted only 15 years. Kamaladevi's sensitive nature was seriously buffetted in the wake of the Chattopadhyaya turmoil, for each one of them seemed to be in perpetual motion with such frightening exuberance, it is a miracle she survived to become the most important single personality responsible during the 30s and after Independence for the revival of India's ancient crafts. Her contribution in this field alone has restored to India the glory of her crafts. Not only have millions been enabled to emerge from the burden of Britiain's stranglehold on industry, but her tireless work also released an integral part of the creative soul of our people.

Where freedom led to democracy and then to an exaggerated importance of political action which has done so much to blunt and vulgarise people, Kamaladevei's creative intelligence and the clear-

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cut thrust of her political contribution as a socialist of integrity was outstanding in India's emergence as a nation. She has been the one individual whose profound understanding of India's culture was reflected in her realistic work to safegaurd its beauty and creativity. While most people merely blame the West and modern education for the disappearance of Indian culture, they have done nothing to retain these elements in their own lives and in the upbringing of their children. Greed for money and ruthless ambition to have status and power have been altogether too frequent a pattern of "Indianness" whereas Kamaladevi with her unerring instinct, went straight to the heart of the problem. People's creativity in theatre, music and dance and in the craft skills of their hands were the materials by which she helped to shape many things we take for granted today, exhibited for instance in the festivals of India all over the world. Her 400-page memoirs are even so, merely a glimpse into a life which has covered sixty years of our recent history.

As an active member of the Socialist Party and a true believer in human dignity at all levels of society, Kamaladevi was at home in every walk of life and in any country . Her travels alone are an odyssey, and in each place her memoirs recount the meaningful discussions she had with the great people of the time: Henri Cartier Bresson in Paris, a Badshah Khan in Afghanistan, a Chiang Kai Shek in Chung King, the military Governor of Jerusalem, Abdullah Tell, the Gadar Party of Indian patriots in California, Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who had a fascination for Indian philosophy , Amir Abd El Krim in Egypt, hero of the Moroccan fight for Freedom and countless others.

In her political life, however, nothing was easy because she fought for principles as much as for the cause itself. The impact of Gandhi's action in Champaran and Chauri Chaura brought her into the mainstream of public life. She wrote,"He was a leader who showed to a growing generation a picture of a new life through a programme of action which was satisfaying and made politics real to us".

It was after her period of college in England as a sociologist, that her path was defined for her in the meeting in Moscow with Sarojini's revolutionary elder brother Virendra. Gandhiji and Virendra were two important influences in her life.

The difficulties of her marriage she translated into chamionship of the cause of women, and under the impact of Mrs. Cousins , one of the greatest women leaders of the feminist movement in India at the time, Kamaladevi brought actions of significance to the work of the all India Women's Conference. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, a man wanted by the British Government for revolutionary

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activities in Moscow, made the impact that turned her into an ardent Socialist. She must have taken to heart his statement, "Before you can fight your adversary, you must know his full nature, for which you must study him. Then you can gauge the type of battle you have to wage".

She recalls the many battles she had to wage over the years. There was the famous Salt March and launching of Satyagraha on April 6,1919 - the beginning of India's revolution, and she was in the heart of it.

She had organised the Congress "Orange Brigade" of the Seva Dal , a body of disciplined volunteers, after her apprenticeship as a volunteer in the Belgaum Congress Session in 1920 , and went on to its Headquarters in Hubli. This was a far cry from her more glamorous life in the theatre. It was at this time she met "Gratta" Cousins who launched her into the women's movement later. But the Seva Dal work was her first taste of the hardship and triumphs of discipline

Active with the Youth Leagge in Sri Lanka and the youth Congress at home, she had a vitalising influence and built up a large and vocal youth contingent whose dissatisfaction with the older generation drew upon themselves the wrath of Sardar Vallabhai Patel . In disgust he roundedly charged them with being "utterly irresponsible". Stung to the quick with what she felt was an undeserved and sweeping condemnation, she wrote him a strong letter of protest. After all these years, Kamaladevi still vividly remembers the episode.Meeting Gandhiji some time later, he had her letter in his hand. "Did you write this?" he asked and on hearing her proud affirmative, said softly, "Did you really? When I read it I could hardly believe that." She had hurt him, she could see and this troubled her. But she went on to defend her stance for she could not tolerate an elder maligning all youth and she made this abundantly clear to Gandhiji. That closed the chapter for the time being.

Five years later Sardar Patel in the Congress Working Committee decreed that the Seva Dal should be taken over by the Congress. This was done over her head and she was merely told to organise the women's section. Though hurt and reluctant to accept this situation Pandit Nehru reminded her that they could "not afford to befuddle out thinking, and then sharply, "As for that barbed wire pen of yours, I quail to think of the havoc it can do" apprehensive now of facing the "Ironman", Sardar Patel, to her surprise, he received her warmly and said, "I am glad you are taking over this important assignment... in future just go ahead. I want to assure you I will never interfere".

As a social history of our times, Kamaladevi's involvement in politics, the arts, women's emancipation, and as the first Chairman of the Handicrafts Board and a

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pioneer in refugee resettlement after partition, is in many way an extraordinary chronicle. It brings to life people and events. It also revives our pride in an historic period when as a people we thought, worked, and acted as Indians. The bond of being was the fight for freedom. Into this Kamaladevi introduced the concepts of freedom for women, artisans and in 1947 for refugees to settle in India after Partition as free and honourable citizens.

Tara Ali Baig

Vallabhacarya on the Love Games of Krishna: James D. Redington: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 11984; 490 pp. Rs. 140

As elsewhere, in India too, every tender emotion obtaining in the human world has been used as a metaphor to point to the ideal relation between the human soul and God. In Vedic poetry, God is the fatherliest of fathers (*pitrtama*), motherliest of mothers (*matrtama*). An extraordinary Vedic poem rises to the supreme height of tenderness and described itself as the mother, and God as the little child she fondly embraces. This was the germ of the evolution of that tradition where devotion took the form of *vatsalabhava*, or tender affection for God conceived as a child. The development of this particular response of human sensitivity has been unique to India, in the lore and cult of Krishna as a child. The most important metaphor, however, has been that of God and the soul as lovers. There are pitfalls here and neither the east nor the west seems to have wholly escaped them.

The pitfalls, in the western tradition, can be illustrated by reference to the Song of Songs in the Old Testament and its interpretation. As this reviewer has tried to show elsewhere (*Ancient Jewish Literature*, Orient Longman, 1968), it is in all probability a dramatic poem about a peasant maiden brought to Solomon's harem but later allowed to return to her village when the king finds that her heart is already pledged to a lover. But Jerome in the fourth century started the tradition of interpreting it as an allegory of the union of the soul and its lover, God. And there is instruction here, in the complex temperament of Jerome. He had as strong guilt feelings about sex as Origen who went to the extent of emasculating himself. He wanted to "cut down by the axe of virginity the wood of marriage" and in his counsel to a girl, Eustochium, insists on total celibacy. "Virginity can be lost even by a thought. Wash your bed and water your couch nightly with tears. Let the seclusion of your own chamber ever guard you." But he offers strange compensation by recalling the Song of Songs and accenting its eroticism even while seeming to use it as no more than a metaphor. "Ever

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let the Bridegroom sport with you within... When sleep falls upon you, He will come behind the wall, and will touch your belly. And you will awake and rise up and cry, 'I am sick with love'." The pitfall thus is that the affect which chooses this metaphor may be basically libidinal rather than religious.

In India, the Krishna myth was escalated to profound meaningfulness by Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*. Multifaceted though the figuration of Krishna is in the epic, the erotic does not figure in it. But in the *Harivamsa*, which is particularly concerned with a pastoral style of life, the connection between sex and agricultural fertility rites seen in the traditions of many lands is very clearly present (Bk. II, ch.20). The narration here is lyrical, suspects the existence of no problem. But the approach of the *Bhagavata* is not so unselfconscious. Sex definitely figures in the Rasalila sequences and the text is too explicit to be glossed over (Bk.X, 29, verse 46). But if the author of the great poem senses that the deep connection between sex and the elan of vital living and the inspiration of creativity cannot be ignored, he seems to have also realized that one has to be very guarded in using the sexual relation as a metaphor. The prelude to the dalliance of Krishna and the maidens is full of significant imagery. "The rains then set in. Clouds hide the moon, even as egoism hides the soul. Rain poured down like blessings. The fresh water, like the libation to the Lord, produced a fresh richness and beauty in all. Then autumn came. Sky and water became transparent like minds in meditation. The mire of the roads slowly disappeared like the false notions of the ignorant." The repetition of imagery with a deeper resonance, using the detail in nature to suggest a state of the spirit, is too deliberate to have been unintentional and the intention is to ensure that the metaphor soars on high without succumbing to the gravitational pull of the earthy, the sensuous, the sensual.

But the sensuous, even the sensual, has its own legitimacy and the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva of the twelfth century is one of the most musical and lyrical poems of the world. However, this reviewer has not been able to align with the traditional acceptance of the poem as a metaphorical presentation of divine love and has given detailed reasons elsewhere *(A New History of Sanskrit Literature*, Manohar, 1977). Briefly, the ruler Lakshmana Sena as well as other poets of his court besides Jayadeva wrote erotic poetry and the Radha-Krishna theme came as handy as it proved to be, seven centuries later, in the poetry, music and dance of Wajid Ali Shah's court in Oudh; certain sequences in the poem read like verse renderings of the description of sex techniques in Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*.

If it is felt that the reviewer has taken an unconscionably long time in coming to the book under

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review, the defence is that without a retrospective introduction, the latter would be unintelligible. The volume presents a full translation from the Sanskrit of the *Subodhini* of Vallabhacharya (c. 1475-c. 1531), which is a commentary on the sequences in the Bhagavata (BK.X, chs. 29-32, 35) that narrate Krishna's love games with the maidens.

This is a remarkable text, curious and fascinating at the same time. As a further strategy of caution, the author of the *Bhagavata* has made Janamejaya ask Suka detailed questions about the moral ambiguities of the dalliance. Vallabha explains away all of them to his own great satisfaction. But to many the arguments sound extremely casuistic.

Profoundly humanistic cultural currents have repeatedly been subverted by urbanite, elitist sensibility. Hala Satavahana initiated a great tradition of lyrical love poetry but the tradition later ended up in the oversophisticated feminine profiles of the Nayika lore. Epic and narrative poetry was vibrantly existentialist in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, but later poets coped their external features and produced inflated rhetoric. The analysts of *Dhvani* worked out a more comprehensive theory of poetic suggestion than the Symbolists of France, but many of the poems cited for illustration in the texts relate to veiled messages about assignations of stolen love. Intoxicated by the magnificent systematization of the theory of Rasa-experience in the Indian tradition, Vallabha makes aesthetic experience autonomous, sovereign. Here he has forgotten Bharata's great caution that the propriety *(auchitya)* of Rasa-experience has to be judged in the light of the complex imperatives of life. In the Vaishnava doctrine of translogical difference-cum-identity *(achintya-bhedabheda)*, the Rasa-lila led to profound perceptions. But, perhaps for Freudian reasons, Vallabha was too much engrossed in the gross body of the metaphor. His cult of *Pushti-Marga* led to libertinism which has been well-documented although Kishengarh's painting, starting under its influence, emancipated itself and recovered the finer essence of the metaphor.

However, the text is important, has been included in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works and has been translated for the first time in a western language. Redington has achieved fidelity and, in his Introduction, gives the best presentation of Vallabha's philosophy, such as it is.

Krishna Chaitanya

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Krishna the Divine Lover: Anna L. Dallapiccola (editor): Edita, Lausanne and B.I. Publications, New Delhi, 1982; 218 pp; price not stated.

The amusingly obtuse habit of regarding myth as other people's superstition is a thing of the past. The findings of many humanistic disciplines have converged to reveal the profound significance of myth. Today we have begun to realize that a shared, traditional myth is a bond which unites men with one another, and all of them with the unplumbed mystery from which the world and man have evolved. A profound myth has endless creative fertility. It not only nourishes traditions of philosophical interpretation, but also traditions of poetry and self the visual and the performing arts. The Krishna myth of India is one of the greatest traditions of world myth. And this new book, written by Indian and European scholars, lavishly illustrated and beautifully produced, is a homage to this myth.

The main collaborators in this book are Professor Anna Dallapiccola of Heidelberg University and Professor B.N.Goswamy of the Punjab University. The two have drawn upon the main texts of the tradition and woven a connected narrative of the story. The growth of the myth through the labyrinths of the epochs is traced by Walter Spink of Ann Arbor; the main cults are described by Karuna Goswamy and the influence of the Krishna myth on the visual and performing arts is traced by Karl Khandalavala and Kapila Vatsyayan.

Traditions which mistrusted life on earth and regarded the world as an illusion or a snare are not a monopoly of the East. In Europe we see them in the philosophers of ancient Greece like Parmenides and Zeno and in the second century Gnosticism of Basilides and Valentinus. A similar disenchanted trend had emerged in India too. But the greatest message of the Krishna myth is that the purified heart can experience heaven on earth. Krishna's pastoral village on the Yamuna is the highest transcendental realm and any village on earth can become identical with that village and realm, if men are united to one another, and to God, in bonds of love.

Every tender relation obtaining in the human world has been idealized in the religious traditions to bring out the intimate bond between soul and God. But there are some unique features in the Indian tradition. While God as the father is a familiar concept in many cultures, one scarcely ever sees it expressed with the tenderness of this Vedic prayer. "Stay still, do not go away! With this sweetest song I grasp your garment's hem as a child grasps his father's robe." But the most astonishing development is the reversal of roles in this relation. For another Vedic poem rises to the supreme

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height of tenderness and describes itself as the mother and God as the little child she fondly embraces. This was the germ of the evolution of that unique tradition where devotion took the form of tender affection for God conceived as a child.

The book reproduces the paintings and sculptures inspired by this heart—warming tradition and also gives excerpts from poetry. But to illustrate the way in which this tradition could dissolve profound concepts in deliciously light poetry, an instance may be cited from Surdas. In a delightful domestic cameo, infant Krishna complains to his mother that his elder brother is teasing him. He is told that he was bought in the market, since it is obvious that he cannot be the child of Nanda and Yasoda; they are both fair while Krishna is blue. Earth and sky mingle strangely to give profundity to this type of humour, for Krishna was blue because the infinite deeps of the heavens are blue. Van Gogh also sought blue for a liberating euphoria. "Instead of painting the ordinary wall of the mean room, I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, intensest blue that I can contrive...".

But as the child Krishna grew up into a young man, he became the supreme symbol for another, equally intimate relation: between the soul as the beloved desired by deity, and ardently desiring him in return. The dalliance of Krishna and the maidens, in the *Bhagavata Purana*, is spun out of the loveliest material that nature can provide: moonlight on the river, the scented breath of the night breeze flowing from the heart of the woods and the call of Krishna's flute heard by the maidens even in their sleep. But the imagery is used with great care. "The rains set in. Clouds hide the moon, even as egoism hides the soul. Rain poured down like blessings. The fresh water, like the libation to the lord, produced a fresh richness and beauty in all. Then autumn came. Sky and water became transparent like minds in meditation, the mud of the roads slowly disappeared like the false notions of the ignorant." This repetition of imagery with deeper resonance, to indicate the time and venue of the union, conserves the spiritual meaning by controlling the sensuousness.

Perhaps, in the subsequent development, the sensuousness became rather overemphasized. In Europe too, this has happened in the ardent devotion of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. In India, the profounder meaning was never quite lost sight of, in the great traditions that evolved, in the songs of Andal of the south and Meera of the north, both of whom regarded themselves as the brides of Krishna, in the lovely miniatures created by the numerous Rajput principalities of the plains and the Himalayan valleys. Excerpts and reproductions of these poetic and pictorial traditions enrich the book. If in the court poetry of

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Lakshmana Sena of Bengal and the court dances in Kathak style of Nawab Wajid Ali of Oudh, the Radha-Krishna story became wholly sensuous, we should remember that the spell of Krishna rescued many traditions from becoming routine or precious. The radiant figure of Krishna came to dominate the poetry and painting of the tradition of seasonal song (Baramasa), of profiles of men and women in the various situations of amorous involvement, of visualizations of melodic moulds (Ragamalas).

This reviewer must voice one regret about this remarkably fine book. If creation is *Lila*, divine sport, it is a very serious enterprise too and the meaning of the Krishna myth is not fully understood if we remember only the pastoral melody played on his flute in the heart of the moonlit woods on the banks of the Yamuna. The melody was heard again, played fortissimo to ride high over the thunderous clamour of the war drums, conches and trumpets in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The profounder meaning of the Krishna myth is that of partnership between man and deity in the redemption of history where ruthless destruction of regimes that have become rotten is often unavoidable for regeneration. A section on the meaning of the moment and message of the *Gita* in the field of Kurukshetra should also have been included when a fairly comprehensive book of this type on the Krishna myth was attempted. Even if it were to be argued that the volume was limited to the discussion of Krishna as the divine lover, the exclusion of this aspect would be difficult to justify, for the profoundest meaning of the *Gita* is that there is an abiding delight beyond the pain of the world because even the tragic is pure aesthetic relish in the *atma-rati* (self-relish) of deity. This is the supreme development of love in a narcissim, the self-love of a self that relished itself as enriched by the relish of the world in spite of the tears at the heart of things.

But the Krishna myth has many facets and, indirectly at least, through the poetry and the paintings, another important aspect has been brought out. It is because he symbolizes the peace and beauty of a pastoral life attuned to nature that Krishna continues to be the most beloved god of the masses of India who even now belong to the rural areas. In the *Bhagavata* and the *Harivamsa,* there are very specific references to conserving the forests on the slopes of the Govardhan mountain for a life of ecological balance and harmony. The Krishna myth has a myriad vital messages for the contemporary world.

The subtitle of the book is "Myth and Legend through Indian Art". The claim implied here has been superbly vindicated, for the assembled collection of paintings and sculptures in the rich illustration is a treasure one can endlessly enjoy.

Krishna Chaitanya

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Monkey on the Hill of God: *Bunny Reuben:* Virgo Books, 1985; 148 pp; Rs. 60.

Bunny Reuben's stories collected in this volume are about buying and selling human beings. The society or world in which these people live, from the headclerk in a government office to the man who has married money in the shape of a repulsive wife, is a world (ostensibly contemporary Bombay) where they have become purchasable commodities, either through misfortune or just because everyone else is a commodity, it is the acceptable thing. If you can't be bought or sold, you do not exist, you are invisible. While Reuben mercilessly exposes this ethos, the stories sometimes seem suffocating because there is no relief, not a single character in sight who has any vestige of pride or integrity. There seems to be no possible escape from this land of *Circe* where all humanity has turned into greedy animals. The author could have provided some relief with humour - tone would have even accepted gladly black, sadistic humour - but he has none to offer. Or at least, even in the case of a story such as *A Question of Masters* where the Goanese clerk opts for a life of comfort as a film star's cook, there is not sufficient wild exaggeration to make the story funny, although the situation has the potential for being a hilarious one. The narrative is all deadpan, the ambition of the Goanese graduate to be a headclerk is not ridiculed in any way, we are not allowed to feel superior to the graduate-cook, and so the potential for humour is not exploited and the story falls a little flat. The ingredient essential to comedy, the sensation of feeling superior to the characters involved in the comic situation, is entirely missing in Bunny Reuben. All along he seems to be saying - "You and I are no better than these people caught up in the grinding life of the metropolis".

In this reader's opinion, the best, most mature story in the collection is *The Woman Who asked a Question*. In the course of the narrative, we are introduced to an aging, dying prostitute (presumably Anglo-Indian, since she is called Ma Henley), her nurse, Sunanda and Sunanda's fiance. Presumably Ma Henley is dying of diabetes because she has a craving for sugar which is fatal to her. We also learn that, unlike most prostitutes, she had, in her youth, had the habit of saving money and now in old age and disease, she owns a house and car and sufficient capital to be plagued by a priest who wants her to finance an orphanage. To the priest she says, "I can't work up any sympathy for people I've never seen, it'd be insincere. But I made a bargain with you ..... I give all my money to your charities. Build an orphanage, do anything you like with it... On condition you give me a convincing answer to my

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question. But of course you can't. Nobody can answer that one, they've all been trying since the beginning of time - why are we born?" She asks the question of her lawyer, her nurse Sunanda and Sunanda's fiance. In the last few days of her life, Ma Henley perhaps finds the answer to her question, if not in words, at least in feeling, when she becomes emotionally attached to Sunanda, Sunanda's fiance, and the children of her tenants. When she dies, Ma Henley has become for the first time in her life, emotionally involved with the fate of other people. She is not lonely in death and as the young doctor, Sunanda's fiance', says - "See her smile. Of course she found the answer".

While *The Woman Who Asked a Question* is a story with some faith in the value of human existence, two other powerful stories *The Professional Mourners* and *Monkeys on the Hill of God* are savage portrayals of dehumanization. *Professional Mourners* takes us into the psychology of a bania joint family where an unscrupulous businessman is hypocritically mourned by relatives and professional mourners who have to be paid. At his cremation, all are professional mourners, none feels any grief, except his mistress. While reading the story *Monkeys on the Hill of God*, my mind reverted to Albert Camus' short story *The Adulterous Woman*. Both stories deal with the uniquely human yearning for transcendence. In Camus' story, the wife slowly realizes her repulsion for her husband who stands for the money-grabbing civilization which the couple are escaping from on a bus trip into the interior of Northern Africa. Camus' story ends with the woman feeling a sense of identity with the bands of nomadic Arabs travelling through the desert with few possessions but entirely in freedom. Her adultery has been only a mental one, she has been unfaithful with the feeling of Freedom.

Reuben's story *Monkeys* however, is at the same time more complex and more cliched and at least to my reading with less philosophical or existential value. Here, as in many of the stories in the collection, it is the money society which is the real protagonist. With Reuben, money is not just a backdrop or causal factor in the story Kashinath's obese wife pulls the purse strings. In the stream-of-consciousness narrative we find out that Kashinath, after having failed in engineering and drifting around in the Arts school, had no choice but to marry the rich, fat and ugly Shanti or rather her father's money. Both of them had in a sense, been in love before and their marriage is one of convenience about which neither of them has any illusions. The couple are on a cheap pilgrimage to a holy place near Bombay. The holy shrine must be reached by climbing a very steep hill. While Shanti takes a palanquin carried by starving old men, Kashinath climbs the hill

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by himself. Climbing the hill is the first real achievement for him in a lifetime of shameless compromise. On reaching the top, he has some kind of a transcendental experience. Reuben writes - "Like dirty clothes the unconscious thought and life patterns of years fell away from him and something ineffable took over. For one intoxicated moment he felt he could fly and the lunatic impression suffused him that his soul had floated out of his body, merged itself into the atmosphere from where it came, leaving his body behind with an ember still burning, curiously, to experience the intolerable ecstasy." Perhaps Bunny Reuben's intention is to show that the most soiled, worthless life can be redeemed, that it is possible for every man to transcend the corrupting world of compromise. Unfortunately, at least to my reading, Reuben is not successful if this is his intention. The overwhelming impression the reader is left with is of a world where the reality is harsh and the individual is completely defeated in the struggle. All the characters in the nine stories, the headclerk who takes a bribe, the old man who attends weddings on false pretences, the lovers who have to separate because their marriages are arranged, the hypocritical mourners, they are all defeated people. One wonders whether Bunny Reuben feels that the human being is basically frail and weak. As a social realist and short story writer, he is in the tradition of Guy de Maupassant or Somerset Maugham, not in the optimistic tradition of Gorky or D.H.Lawrence.

Finally, a word about Reuben's technique. He is clearly a master of the stream-of-consciousness technique and he uses it to great advantage through flashbacks and mental reactions to stimulus from the outside world. Reuben is completely at home in the multicultural polyglot world of Bombay at the end of the twentieth century and there is never any element of escapism in any of the stories. The author, if not the characters, squarely faces the dehumanizing reality of the modern Indian city.

Reading *Monkeys on the Hill of God* is neither a waste of time nor a pellet of opium. There are almost no printing mistakes, a polyglot glossary is provided. Unfortunately, the dust-jacket cover is a lurid picture worthy of a Bombay talkie poster but this can be avoided in the next edition.

Amitava Ray

Textiles and Weavers in Medevial South India: *Vijaya Ramaswami:* Oxford University Press, 1985; 250 pp. Rs. 150.

The history of Indian textile industry goes back to hoary antiquity and cotton cloth was being woven all over India more than 4000 years ago. This has been proved by the objects unearthed

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from the Indus Valley sites. The same is true of South India also, although substantial data on textiles and weavers is not available earlier than the mediaeval period when the South Indian handlooms prospered, reaching their heyday with the Vijayanagara empire in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The book, a doctoral thesis, focusses attention on the ups and downs of mediaeval weaving communities and the textile industry from the 10th to the 17th century. As a comprehensive history of textile industry it deals with the status and role of weavers in mediaeval South Indian society as well as with the economic and technological aspects. It comprises six chapters preceded and followed by an introduction and conclusion. The introductory chapter takes in its purview the historical antecedents of weaving in the mediaeval period and the reasons for its decline with the coming of Europeans on the Indian scene.

The following chapters deal with the vicissitudes of the weaver communities in the light of the changing fortunes of the handloom industry in mediaeval South India as well as on the production processes, trade, textile centres, textile varieties, dyeing and printing, taxation, religion, caste and culture, commercial organization and the relationship between weavers and the State. The position of the weavers has been studied in three distinct phases. The first phase extending from the 9th to the 13th centuries was characterized by flourishing trade conditions, powerful guilds, village assemblies and caste-based armies. The second phase from the 14th to the 16th centuries saw the rise of the Vijayanagara empire which gave a boost to urbanization, growth of trade under royal patronage and commercial wars between the Golconda and Vijayanagara kingdoms. Towards the close of the 16th century, the Portuguese established themselves in Goa.

In the post-independence era, the author opines, Indian textile mills have displaced handlooms at home and abroad. The insidious penetration of powerlooms has been such that block-printed mill imitations are available even of such inimitable textiles as the kalamkaris of the Andhra Pradesh and the Madurai tie-and-dye sarees known as chungdis. The name chungdis itself suggests that the practitioners of this technique were Rajasthanis settled in South India. What is attempted in this work is a historical retrospect, a case history of South Indian textiles and weavers.

There are six illustrations in black and white of cloth hangings known as kalamkaris that give us a glimpse of the changes in themes that took place during the Muslim and Company periods. This book should be useful for anyone interested in the history of South Indian textiles, weavers and their socioeconomic conditions. This account would serve as an useful

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guide to the present-day administrators engaged in welfare activities for the craftsmen.

Subhashini Aryan

India Within the Ganges: *Susan Gole:* Jayaprints, New Delhi, 1983; 239 pp; Rs. 175.

India Within the Ganges by Susan Gole is about early maps of India. She has taken the title for the book from the Latin name *India intra Gangem* - 'India within the Ganges' given by Europeans to India to the east of the Indus. Just as India was known by many names to early Europeans, the name India was also used for all the known or unknown land beyond the Indus including sometimes also areas on the African continent. In her study, Susan Gole has also tried to discover the aesthetic value of early maps, the glimpses these provide about early travellers to India and how they viewed the country and as evidence of the changing importance of towns and districts over the years.

The book is addressed to two widely differing groups of readers and written accordingly in two parts. The first part consists of a text divided into seven chapters which narrate the story of how the maps came to be drawn. The first chapter is about indigenous maps. Though no evidence is available about early Indian maps and only 'brief references to what might have been cartographic depictions' are available about early Indian literature, Susan Gole hypothesizes that maps were perhaps drawn by early Indians to illustrate their ideas of the world and their own country. However, since little cartographic material has survived in India she concludes that 'the story of maps of India must be recounted almost entirely from a European viewpoint.'

Among the old extant maps available is the one copied in 1364 by Jukai, a Japanese priest from the map illustrating Hiuen Tsang's *Si-yu-ki*. Only few Arab or Persian works included maps which 'showed little progress in cartography since the time of Ptolemy.' The maps of Sind and Hind by Ebn Haukel, Arab geographer of the tenth century do not give precise geographical location of places. The twelfth century Arab geographer Al Idrisi shows in his map a landlocked Indian Ocean. Likewise, no improvement in cartographic art is witnesed in works of Persian geographers like Abu Zaid in the tenth century 'who made an atlas of twenty-one maps which were copied by Istahri and Mukaddasi.' Even Al-Biruni in the eleventh century and later Al Kazwimi 'did nothing to improve the cartographic art.' According to Susan Gole, the maps which came nearer to showing the correct

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shape of India are two sets of maps in Persian. One of them was a world map drawn by Hamdullah Mustaufi in 1340 which showed India as a peninsula. The other was made three hundred years later by Sadiq Isfahani of Jaunpur who included India on six sheets in an atlas. The major towns of north India were marked in this map which in comparison to contemporary European maps show a truer course for the Ganga and the Yamuna.

Maps were also made of Maratha forts, which are available like those of the south-western coast done perhaps in the late eighteenth century. One of the maps discovered near Pune was a large one measuring about 15 feet by 15 feet, showing hills, forts and the distances between them as well as the rivers and towns.

When James Rennell, the first Surveyor General, made his large map of India in 1782, he made use of four maps drawn by Indians. These were, a large map of Punjab with names in Persian, a map of Gujarat drawn by a 'native of Guzerat', a 'Hindoo map of Bundela or Bundeland' with names in Persian, and a 'Malabar map; or rather a map drawn by a native of the Carnatic.' There was also an indigenous map of India copied by Anquetil du Perron in 1761 which was published in 1787 with names translated into French.

The second chapter 'Early European Contacts' covers the period from the fifth century B.C. to the fifteenth century. Among the earliest available maps of India is the one by Claudius Ptolemy. He had depicted India in one of the maps in his *Geographia* in the first century. Ptolemy's map survived through the medieval times with the first printed edition dating back to 1477. Susan Gole also refers to Eratosthenes' attempts in the third century B.C. at 'a description of the world based on scientific concepts, not vague mythological tales and travellers' fancies.' She considers likely the depiction of India by Eratosthenes to be much more accurate than that of Ptolemy four centuries later.

Ptolemy's atlas had twenty-six maps; out of these twelve were of Asia with India shown on the tenth. Despite the fact that the shape of India cannot be recognized in the map, the topographical details are surprising. The only available Roman map depicting India is 'the Peutinger Table, a 12th or 13th century copy of a map made sometime in the 1st century A.D.' This road map gives very little detail in its eleventh sheet.

Reference to India in a first century A.D. sea-manual, *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea*, the journeys of St. Thomas the Apostle, or Bishop Sigelm's journeys to India as envoy of King Alfred of England in the ninth century indicate knowledge of routes. We also have the world map drawn by an Alexandrian monk in the sixth century which only shows that 'his Chris-

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tian fervour was stronger than his geographical knowledge.'

The routes to Asia were closed to the Europeans after the advent of Islam; in the thirteenth century the Christians began travelling again to the east. Among them, Marco Polo is better known. The story of his travels which he wrote in 1299 remained 'the main source for cartographers for the next two hundred years.'

The earliest surviving map to show India as a peninsula is the Catalan atlas of 1375. Compiled by Abraham Cresques of Portugal it is used mainly as the account of Marco Polo and is 'far more accurate than many maps drawn long after the arrival of the Portuguese.' The term 'India' was used by Marco Polo for most of Asia which was subdivided into India within and beyond the Ganges, India extrema or superior, Greater India, Middle India, and Lesser India. Susan Gole also refers to accounts of other travellers some of whom went inland into India. These accounts, however, were not available to cartographers till much later. Basically, therefore, the maps accompanying the text of Ptolemy's *Geographia* were more acceptable than others. The first edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia* containing maps was first printed in Bologna in 1477, quickly followed by editions published from Rome in 1478, in 1480 from Florence and Ulm in 1482. After the Portuguese sailors sailed directly to India, Ptolemy's maps either began to be redrawn or completely new shapes were added to the maps of Asia.

The third chapter entitled 'Portuguese Foothold' outlines the story of Portuguese travellers and how the information based on their journeys brought about changes in the maps of India. The information collected by these voyagers, begins from Pedro de Covilha who travelled up to Calicut, followed by Vasco da Gama or Pedro Alvarez Cabral who also reached the port of Calicut. The information collected by different travellers was quickly reproduced in manuscript maps which 'were the closely guarded property of the king. Before each voyage the Captain was allowed to draw a map from the royal library, and had to return it as soon as he was safely home, marking in any new territory he had discovered.' In 1502, a chart was stolen and carried away to Italy. In 1506 appeared a new world map showing, for the first time, the Portuguese discoveries. This map shows the peninsula of India but has at the same time immediately to its east Ptolemy's idea of India. The first map showing the triangular shape of India's peninsula was the world map published from Rome in 1508 drawn by Johan Ruysch, a Dutchman working in Italy. At about the same time, Martin Waldseemuller also drew a map showing the correct shape of India as shown by Ruysch.

The first map which gave prominence to India on a separate

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page was drawn by Giacomo Gastaldi in Italy in 1548. It was entitled Calecut and showed only the peninsula - the known extent of Portuguese penetration. Gastaldi's map of Asia was re-engraved in 1561 showing India in a separate sheet map. For the first time, again, the Persian name 'Indostan' was used for India in this map.

At about this time demand for views of towns mentioned in the works, of travellers resulted in a spurt in their publication. In 1572, Georg Braun published six large volumes from Cologne which claimed to contain sketches of all the cities of the world. In this book 'four of the views were of India, Calecut, Cananor, Diu and Goa, the towns captured by the Portuguese, as if no other towns in India existed.'

The Dutch fully utilized the experience and expertise of the Portuguese mariners and cartographers and 'the charts of famous Portuguese mapmakers, like the Homems, Luiz Teixeira and Fernao Vaz Dourado, were engraved in the Nertherlands during the late 16th and early 17th centuries.'

Perhaps the first map of India in English was published from London in 1598. It was originally drawn by Peter Plancius, who later became an official cartographer for the Dutch East India Company. The map was drawn for the book by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, an enterprising Dutch who had spent seven years in India. It was re-engraved by Robert Beckit for an English edition of the book. Linschoten's maps were subsequently copied in several other works. Then we have two maps published in 1615 from Madrid showing the kingdoms of Gujarat and Bengal in more detail than the earlier maps on India. These maps, published in J. Barrows' fourth volume on Portuguese conquests, are carefully drawn on a large scale and 'appear to be the earliest examples of surveyed maps made in India.'

As Susan Gole rightly points out, European travellers found great difficulty in reproducing names of places they visited and when retranslated these place names were spelt differently in different maps. This situation led Thomas Jefferys to write in his *Explanation of the Map of the Seat of War, on the Coast of Choromandel, with an Account of the War*, published from London in 1754 : 'We must not omit Occasion to take notice of the Confusion produced in History by such inaccurate Accounts, as well as by the Corruption of the Names of Places, in which the several European Nations seem to strive, who shall disfigure them most. A barbarous contention this! and in which the French had so effectually succeeded, that one of the Missioners in the year 1724 wrote word to Europe, "that scarce any of the names of People or Places found in Mr. Will del Isle's Map of Ceylon (properly Selan) were found in the Indies".'

With the decline of Portu-

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guese power, the Dutch and then the English gained foothold in the seas and trade. The fourth chapter 'Finding the Way' describes the British inroads into India and how following the formation of the East India Company the British ultimately established themselves in India. Susan Gole also mentions briefly how the Europeans, with the expansion of their view of the world, became interested in learning about strange lands and travel books were published to feed this interest.

The map of India drawn by William Baffin printed in London in 1619 is one of the early maps. Susan Gole points out that it is not much known that Baffin was the first modern English cartographer of India. Baffin's map was based on Thomas Roe's geographical description of the Mughal empire, travellers' tales so far published and information gained from hearsay. As a result, there is considerable confusion in the map in regard to placing of towns.

The other important maps of India, with varying degrees of mistakes, are the Dutch maps drawn by Ortelius, Mercator, de Jode, Henricam Hondius, or by Sanson in France. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, cartography had reached its peak as a pictorial decorative art in Holland.

An interesting point that Susan Gole notes is that 'from the time of Baffin's map most maps of India were drawn in two parts, the northern one of the Mughal empire, and the southern of the peninsula, or India within the Ganges as it was called, as though the northern part were not also west of the Ganges.'

Despite a number of travel books, there were few new maps of India throughout the seventeenth century except that of Baffin's. It was only towards the end of the seventeenth century that new maps began to appear.

When Phillipus Baldaeus of Holland published his book on South India in 1671 it also contained 'two maps of the peninsula rather strangely split vertically so that one has east at the top of the page and the other west.' Vincenzo Coronelli's map of north India published in 1694 was elegantly drawn and also contained alternate spellings of place names making them more comprehensible.

The first map to give prominence to the Indian subcontinent as a separate entity was a small map drawn in 1710 by Herman Moll in London. Earlier in 1701 he had drawn a map 'India or the Mogul's Empire' in which he had also included Cambodia Cochin and China.

Equally interesting are the navigation charts: the first chart showing details of a harbour is the large map of Bombay and Salsett drawn in 1685 by Samuel Thornton. It is also noticeable that the land map of India were not updated and mistakes in names are perpetuated in the reprints.

The fifth chapter 'European

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Rivalry' is about maps of India prepared by persons belonging to different European nations. It was the missionaries who were in the best position to record the geography of India but kept their knowledge to themselves.

According to Susan Gole, excellence in map production had passed from Holland to France in the first half of the eighteenth century. The maps of d'Anville, whom she calls the first scientific mapmaker, drawn in the middle of eighteenth century were to form the basis of the more accurate maps of future. D'Anville published his large two sheet map of India in 1752 for which he drew from all available source-books and also tried to verify all his material. His *Eclairissemens geographiques sur la carte de 1'Inde*, originally published in 1753 from Paris was also reissued in an English translation published from London in 1759 which 'formed a basis for Rennell some thirty years later.' His map continued to be used or was even reproduced by others like Thomas Kitchin, John Haywood, Thomas Maurice, etc.

The Anglo-French rivalry to gain supremacy in the south led to continuous fighting and demand for correct maps showing positions of forts and towns also increased and 'for the first time army engineers were traversing the country.' Correct measurements were taken instead of showing locations based on vague measurements supplied by travellers or on guesswork.

At about this time, another French cartographer, Jean Nicolas Bellin, drew several maps of India. His *Petit Atlas Maritime* published in 1763 containing 581 maps of coasts included eighteen of India. Some of his maps were also used by Antoine Francois Prevost in his collection of voyages.

Two prolific English cartographers were Thomas Jefferys and Thomas Kitchin. Jefferys had drawn several maps including a large two sheet map of India in 1768 and a map of Bengal relying on the maps done by d'Anville. Kitchin's earliest maps were for the *London Magazine*. He also engraved maps for Robert Orme's *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, published in 1763 and many other books and magazines.

During this period town plans also became popular apart from maps of strongholds of the Marathas on the west coast. According to Susan Gole, during the eighteenth century there was also revival of interest in antique maps of India and Ptolemy's map of India was reprinted several times. She also notes that d'Anville and Rennell relied upon Ptolemy and Pliny in their maps 'for parts of which they had no more recent knowledge.'

By the end of eighteenth century actual surveys began to be undertaken and fairly accurate maps became available. These are discussed in the sixth Chapter entitled 'British Conquest.' The appoint-

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ment of James Rennell as the first Surveyor General of Bengal in 1767 marks the beginning of maps 'drawn from actual measurement on the ground.' Rennell also trained young men to form a full department and systematic surveying was undertaken for civil and financial purposes as well. He also utilized diverse sources of information including Persian. During his stay in India Rennell had completed a survey of British possessions in north-east India. It was published in 1776 under the title 'An Actual Survey of the Provinces of Bengal, Bahar & Co.' Drawn on a scale of twelve miles to an inch, it was 'the first map to be based entirely on measured distance and survey in the field.' Rennell's *A Bengal Atlas* contained thirteen maps engraved between December 1778 and March 1780 drawn on different scales. In 1782 he published a map of 'Hindoostan' on a smaller scale than d'Anville's. In 1788 he re-drew it on an enlarged scale. The five different editions of his *Memoir of a Map of Hindustan or the Mogul's Empire*, published originally in 1783, contained maps showing inland navigation, course of the Ganges, principal roads and divisions of the Indian peninsula, marches of British armies, etc.

The seventh Chapter is very brief, entitled 'Survey Maps.' The first to make use of triangulation in India was William Lambton when, in 1802, he began work in Madras and was able to complete the triangles for the whole of south India and much of central India. It is interesting to note that Rennell considered triangulation as waste of money and regarded route surveys as accurate enough.

Rapid progress was made in the Great Triangulation Survey, topographical survey and revenue survey and by 1861 most of the triangles had been completed. In 1870, cadastral surveys had also begun and India was one of the few countries in the world to be mapped extensively and thoroughly.

The last chapter 'Printed Maps of India 1477-1480' catalogues the maps 'giving prominence to the subcontinent.' In this useful catalogue are listed 125 cartographers with details of their maps apart from various editions of the tenth table of Asia in Ptolemy's *Geographia*.

This book has a general bibliography on cartography, Indian history and geography, and three indexes. Index I lists publications containing maps of India (1477-1800); Index II lists 'cartographers, surveyors, engravers and publishers whose names are engraved on the face of maps, printed up to 1800' and in Index III are given 'kingdoms, towns, rivers, districts, etc. named in the titles of maps printed up to 1800.' The sixty-five illustrations, including one in colour, consist of maps of India or its parts, plans of cities and towns and of the Battle of Plassey, coastal areas, rivers, navigation charts, cartouches, etc. The specimens of titles of maps, scales, cartouches,

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078107

wind-roads, etc.; on the end-paper of the book are also quite interesting.

India within the Ganges by Susan Gole is a useful work for cartographers, historians and geographers. The material has been painstakingly collected from diverse sources. Particularly useful is the catalogue of maps of India printed between 1477 and 1800. Apart from providing detailed information on maps, it can be used for identifying any loose sheet map of India detached from an original book. This indeed is important, for, after all, maps do sometimes surface as isolated sheets having got detached from books or when taken out by library kleptomaniacs!

One, however, wishes that Susan Gole had ascertained in greater detail about indigenous maps which would have shown that it is not necessarily correct to recount the story of maps of India 'almost entirely from a European viewpoint.' There exist drawings showing plans of temples, palaces, forts and also maps of clearly defined geographical areas. For instance, the Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda has a large-sized map on cloth of Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan showing towns, rivers, topographical features, flora and fauna characteristic of the area. R.N. Mehta, who has described and discussed this map in detail, ascribes it to mid-eighteenth century. Mehta has also drawn attention to the tradition of map-making as evident from the *Gangadasa-Pratapa-Vilasa Nataka* of mid-fifteenth century which refers to maps of towns, or the tradition of making topographical maps as can be discerned from the *Pichhvais* of *Vrajachoryasi* or the Jaina *Vijnaptipatras*. Then there are the Kachchi navigators' *Roznama* or the log books maintained by them. Besides, there are also navigation charts of the Indian ocean done by different European travellers where India figures prominently which seem to have been omitted; for instance, there exists a map of the Indian Ocean done approximately in 1650 by Hugo Allardt entitled *Nova Tabula India Orientalis*, a seventeenth century navigational chart of the Indian Ocean by J. Van Keulen or the map of Asia prepared in Venice in 1696 by Lirno Gonzalez. The contributions of Plainstead, Michael Topping, Hugh Cameron, Robert Kelly, etc. should also have found a place in her narration. It is hoped that she would be taking these into account in some future work on Indian maps.

It would have been easier if in the indexes the cartographers, surveyors, etc. were listed with the surname first instead of initials. A properly verified and detailed bibliography would also have added to the utility of the volume.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, *India within the Ganges* by Susan Gole is an important work and more contributions from her on this fascinating subject would be eagerly awaited.

B.M. Pand

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